



Edubabble

An Educator Zine

Fall 2021

《竹》

陈毅星

晨露晓湿竹叶微，
习风拂叶自芳菲。
尽慕竹君春日惬，
哪知寒冬傲雪归。

Bamboo (Translation)

By Star Lew

Morning dew, wet bamboo leaves
The wind blows the leaves, flying up and down
Everyone admires Bamboo's amity in the spring
Who would know that it comes from standing up
to the harsh winter snow.

Photo by Emily Lew





Painting by Gabby Cardozo

OBJECTIVES:

By the end of the zine, educators will....

- Express the **challenges** and **rewards** of teaching and counseling
- Encourage educators to view themselves as **creatives**
- Develop community and **self-advocacy** among educators
- **Dismantle** White supremacist culture within education
- Represent the **diverse** voices of the education community
(Including but NOT limited to BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, Differently Abled)
- Share insights into **complexities** of teacher + counselor identity
- Spark "joy" and **self-care** among educators' communities

And above all...

GET MESSY!
&

HAVE FUN!!

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A Year in the Life of a Library Teacher During a Pandemic (A Haiku Series)

by Erin Dalbec

Sitting in yoga
cross legged on mat, I breathe
these pre-covid times



Photo by Emily Lew



Photo by Kate Shaughnessy

I Am From

by Jenni Morreale

I am from the ashes of the New York skyline.
From bodegas and winding, binding, blue-lit bridges.
I am from an expressway which goes nowhere and the same school as Wu Tang

I am from generations of women with latin tongues.
From men more like phantoms, who killed their words with poison breath.
But I am also from books, and empty journals, and my grandmother's piano.

I am from two mixes who created olive skin and dark eyes I had to learn to love.
From cold winters and humid summers.
I am from darkness where I found my light.

'98

by Davie Yarborough

'98.

I start listening to the radio.

Hip Hop. Rap. Go-Go.

I lay in bed with the radio tuned to Love Talk and Slow Jams; window open, ceiling fan on the slowest speed so I can follow the blades.

I breathe slowly. Our house must sweeten the air, somehow, because summer doesn't smell like this anywhere but here.

'98.

Summer camp is extended because a bunch of DC public schools need new roofs.

I do enrichment workbooks for fun, and exaggerate my eye test so I can pick frames that make me look smart like my parents.

The kids at camp say I sound like Marsha from the Brady Bunch. "Marsha, Marsha, Marsha!" "That's Jan," I say.

It takes me a while to realize that I'm proving their point

'98.

I've had my period for a year. I remember because Aunt Melva congratulated me on becoming a woman. "I get this sprinkle once a month and I get to be a woman?" I thought. "That's kind of cool," I thought.

Until morning; the carnage.

But that was last year. Now, I'm a menstrual war vet with no one my age to process my battles with.

It's pool day, so we have to pack an extra set of clothes. And because Boomers were raised on bloomers, my momma sends me to camp with the biggest, whitest pairs that ever existed in the history of underwear.

They get caught on the end of my favorite camp counselor's long flashlight when a theft in camp prompts bag checks.

Confused at the extra weight, he pulls the flashlight upwards from my bag to get a closer look for what feels like an eternity.



a cut above by Alex Laser

And by the time he isn't confused any longer, I am too embarrassed to be embarrassed.

"Boys like him aren't into girls like me," I think. "Boys like him aren't into girls who wear granny panties."

'98.

I go to my mother's closet to model my new bathing suit in her full-length mirror. I have a figure. But my bff at camp? She is super curvy and all the boys seem to like that, including some of the camp counselors, who are a few years older than us. It's like every other week, someone's asking her "for a chance." And, most of the time, she says yes. And they think her curves tell them something about her that she doesn't say out loud. And that keeps me from wanting curves like hers.

'98.

I take my thick white socks to camp because the skate party on wheels arrives in the Lamond Riggs parking lot. It's on and poppin'. The top of my head barely clears the counter as I request a pair of skates. Maybe they are 9s and the socks make them fit like the 8.5 shoes I normally wear.

'98 is the summer of How's It Goin' Down. WKYS and WPGC have to be playing it hourly. It comes on during the couples' skate, and I consider asking my crush to take a spin around the parking lot. Too slow: he asks Summer Camp Bff. She says yes. I watch them glide together around the parking lot as DMX's second verse is gearing up on the party speaker. My crush will ask Summer Camp Bff for a chance- I know it's only a matter of time. I resolve that boys like him don't like girls who wear granny panties either. At night, does DMX make it to Love Talk and Slow Jams? How's it Going Down is a love song, right?

I still sing along.



Photo by Alex Laser

It's about wanting to be with someone you can't be with. I know all about that because most of my curves are still on layaway. And I wear granny panties. Home and summer leave a sweet breeze bundled on my windowsill. I savor the scent. I switch from WPGC during a commercial and catch How's It Goin Down on WKYS. I'm going to catch it from the beginning soon so I can press record on my cassette player because it plays too much to not be a part of this summer's soundtrack. I lay on my back, hands rested under my head. I smile; my tween angst is no match for Faith Evans' adlibs. In that moment, I don't know half of the lyrics that I think I know.



You Up? by Eileen Garagin

Gangs of Midwest

by Tim Finnegan

When I was eight I was recruited into a gang. Seriously. In the town of Maplewood, there was an unspoken terror whispered on everyone's lips, and that unspoken word was "nogoodniks." I know what you're thinking: Nobody says the word 'nogoodniks' anymore, if they ever did! And maybe that's true, but in Minnesota, we have our own vernacular, and 'nogoodniks' was right up there with 'budinski', 'pop', and 'o fer ya'!

The "nogoodniks" were actually a group of three twelve-year-old boys who attended the local Catholic school—Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Joe Dahlstrom, whose mother was the school nurse; Tod (yes, with only one 'd') Bennett, and Adam Breheim, a fat sack of loser whose little sisters were a whole different kind of terror in the neighborhood (and two of whom, if I'm being honest, I was madly in love with—Shelley, the youngest, with whom I went on a date to Richard's market for freezies in our Sunday best clothes; and Elaine, the middle sister who was 200% badass, and over whose frizzy brown hair I swooned on a regular basis). Because Adam was part of this group, he had leverage over every boy in the neighborhood because I was not alone in my amorous hopes of attaining one of the "Breheim babes" to be my girl.

In hindsight, the entire gang was in plain sight—so there were no "whispers" whatsoever. The plan: if you want to join the Maplewood Mayhem Gang, you had to attend a meeting in the basement of the Breheim house, at 7pm on a Thursday night. Who lets their kids wander around at 7pm on a Thursday night? Well, apparently everyone in Maplewood because there was a pile of young boys there—and even a girl: Shelley.

"Alright, listen up, you idiots," Tod began—he was the mouthpiece of the organization. "You think you're tough? You think you can run with the Mayhem? Well I think you think wrong. (...what?) See, in this gang (he gesticulated to the floor so adamantly I worried he might have hyperextended his finger), we go hard. We take no prisoners, and we have no morals. When we say jump, you don't ask why. You say..."

He waited. After a few moments and of tension that could brush you aside in a supermarket, one of the hopefuls blurted out, "Yes?"

"Get the hell out of here, ass clown!" Joe snarled, pointing to the door (or at least to the staircase, which led the fallen hopeful up the stairs that would eventually lead him out of the house—but not before grabbing one of Mrs. Breheim's delicious peanut butter thumbprint cookies, which was also used as a bargaining chip by Adam and the Administration to get more kids into the basement). The wounded child, slump shouldered and about yay tall, commenced his walk of shame.

"The answer," Tod continued in sudden fear all of us might get it wrong and they have no recruits left for their trials," is 'how high?'" By that point, so much time had passed, we forgot what the original question was. Tod brought his hand to his forehead, rubbing it to emphasize his consternation. "When we say, 'Jump,' you say, 'How high?' Understand?"

The recruits nodded.

Then Tod nodded toward Adam, who apparently was the storyteller who would unveil the plan for the recruitment challenge.

"Alright, listen up, cuz I'm only gonna say this once. You wanna be part of the gang, you're going to have to pass three tests of your loyalty and courage. If you fail in even one of these challenges, you're gone. Get it?"

Nodding.

"Alright. Challenge one. In three days' time you must bring us a dead crow. And not just any dead crow. A crow you murdered!"

Today, I can understand the joke he made that he didn't know he made. But back then, we collectively gasped at the obscenity of the request. Naturally, people had questions.

"How are we supposed to kill a crow?"

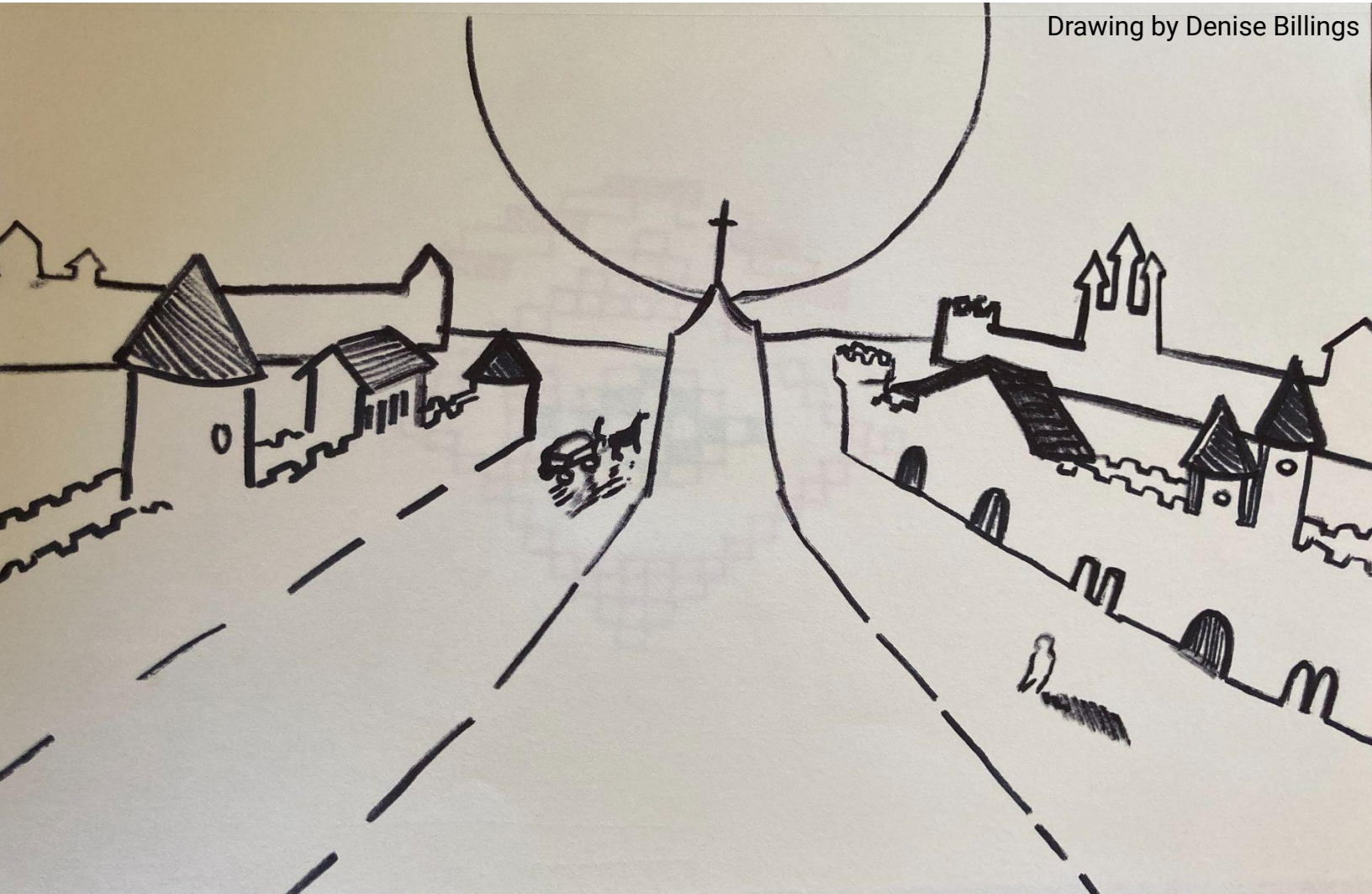
"I don't know, be creative. Anyway, first person to bring us a dead crow gets made a captain. Anyone who brings a crow will advance to the second challenge. Anyone who fails will be on the list..."

"What list?"

Adam, too, now, brought his hand to his forehead and rubbed.

"The shit list, dumbass, what do you think? Now get out of here. You have until seven o'clock on Sunday."

We expected there to be some kind of gong or chime to signal the challenge had begun, but they only stood there, subtly nodding their superiority to each other and waiting for the rest of us to run up the stairs to begin our quest. What they got was a single file line of boys (and Shelley) walking up the stairs quietly to the kitchen to eat one of Mrs. Breheim's thumbprints.



Drawing by Denise Billings

"You guys are so cute!" Mrs. Breheim chimed. Was that the signal?

After the group dispersed we finally recognized our predicament. None of us had ever killed anything more than an insect before, and none of us could even begin to fathom how to get close to, let alone kill, a crafty crow.

My best friends at the time—Jake and Dusty—decided we had better come up with a strategy, but it was getting late, and we knew that crows were morning animals, so we'd convene the following day to formulate a plan.

The following morning I was exhausted having not slept at all the night before. I let my mind run wild over some clever way to tempt a crow into giving its life for a gangland initiation, but every thread led only to a dead end. Jake and Dusty came over and headed to my own basement to think over what we'd do as we played Track and Field on the Nintendo.

"What if we fed a crow a really big piece of bread?" Jake offered. "That way, it'd eat the bread and then choke to death. That'd count, right?"

Dusty was dubious.

"Crows are too smart to eat a piece of bread that big. I think if we're going to do this, we're going to have to hit one with something."

"Okay," I said, "but how does one get close enough to a crow to hit it with something?"

Again we were stuck. Jake dominated the track and field game, like he always did, beating Cheetah on the 100m hurdles. For whatever reason, Dusty and I could only manage to compete on the 100m dash.

"Does anyone have a gun?" Jake offered, gesturing to the Nintendo game box and its equipment modification for Duck Hunt.

"My step dad has one," Dusty said, "but if he finds out I took it, he's belt me so bad I would probably be better off if I used the gun on myself." It was turns on phrase like this that should have led me to grasp what danger Dusty was really in before his situation in life came to a head, but at the time it just seemed like another dead end.

"I don't have a gun, but I have a slingshot," I said, and brought them upstairs to my bedroom to show them. It was a Slingmaster 1000—the same one Bart Simpson used in *The Simpsons*. And since Bart Simpson reigned as the nogoodnik benchmark of our time, we figured a slingshot endorsed—signed even—by the boy wonder himself would have to stand testament to its merit and killing power.

"Have you ever used one of these—I mean, successfully?" Jake asked. He was the pragmatist of the group.

"If by 'successfully' you mean killing an animal or bird, then no."

"What about that time you got that squirrel?" Dusty asked. He was referring to a squirrel that I had managed to maim and then kill at my house before the Hazelwood house by squarely hitting the poor fella in the head with a small rock as it raced across a power line in my backyard. The stone discombobulated the poor critter, but did not kill it. Dazed and then wounded from the fall from the power line, it slumped into a corner by our garage. Since I hadn't intended to hit the creature in the first place, I was beyond upset to see it making an odd squeal so unlike a squirrel. It was clear to me it was trying to make a getaway, but while the brain was fully operational, the body would not respond. Its back was broken. There was nothing that could be done. So I faced a dilemma: let the squirrel die by natural causes—ie time; let the squirrel become prey to some other type of animal—a predator or a scavenger; or finish the job myself—take something that would end its life quickly to mitigate the pain.

Being only five, and blurred by tears, I also wondered what my parents might say to me if they found a mutilated squirrel in the yard. I decided to act quickly. I saw a broken cinderblock underneath some pine trees on our neighbor's property, so I went around the garage and fence and stealthily retrieved the cinder chunk. When I returned the squirrel had seemingly accepted its fate, for it was no longer crying, and no longer struggling to get away. It only breathed heavily. I told the squirrel I was sorry, and that I would never do something like that again, and dropped the stone onto the head. It was over. Then I dug a small hole in the corner of the yard underneath some bushes and buried my mistake.

"I don't want to do that anymore," I told my friends. "That was an accident."

"But Tim," Dusty urged me. "You have to. How else are we going to bag us a crow?" The way he used the word "we" like we were a team and would all be initiated as a crew for one kill made me nervous. Jake and Dusty were pushing me forward as the bad kid so they could ride on my cruel coattails.

"I can't do it!" I cried. "You have to leave."

So it appeared that my hope of joining one (quite possibly the only one) of the gangs of Maplewood was over. But could I really let it end without so much as my best effort? Look at the way all of us kids looked up to Tod, Joe, and Adam! And they hadn't even done anything! Plus the first to bring in the crow would be a captain, Tod promised. That meant that I would be the one looked up to, even among those who made it into the gang. Boys in this neighborhood are like bees from a beehive. I wanted to be *Queen*!

"Timmy?" My heart started to pound and I quickly turned the Nintendo off to become mature (maturer?).

"Yes?"

She walked down the stairs and right up to me. Elaine!

“Elaine? What are you doing here?”

“I just wanted to tell you that my brother is an asshole. Nobody expects you to go around killing animals with slingshots.”

Wait, who said anything about a slingshot? How quickly news travels, especially when it pertains to something scandalous.

“I just don’t want to kill any animals. I don’t know what that has to do with joining a club.”

“Well,” she said, touching my shoulder. I already knew I was a goner. “In order to be in a gang, you might be asked to do things you wouldn’t normally do. That’s why it’s exclusive. And if you do this, not only will you be in the gang, you’ll be *captain* in the gang.”

Had I known who Shakespeare was at the time, I would have applauded her modern, children’s theater rendition of Lady Macbeth. As matters stood, however, I was no better off than Macbeth himself. My whole hot-blooded body shuddered.

The next morning, I walked over to Robinhood park (I’m not kidding—that’s what it’s called) and waited for a group of crows to gather near an overfilled trash can. I figured if I fired my rock into the group, I would have a better chance of getting one than I had if I singled one out. As fate would have it, however, upon my approach most of the crows wised up and flew off to safety, except one who must have felt particularly brazen because not only did it not flee; it looked at me and cawed. It took three crow-sized steps forward and I drew my sling and my stone, closed my right eye (despite being right handed, my stepdad—a hunter—told me that every person has a “master eye” and that only the master eye is dead on in aiming), breathed in, and released the sling.

The audible thud of stone hitting small skull shook me, and I was dazed until the cacophonous cawing and flapping of the crow pulled me out of it. This time I didn’t hesitate, but took a second stone from my pocket, stood right over the crow, slung the stone, and finished the bird. I took a pillowcase and collected the crow the way an owner would his dog’s droppings. From there, I looked around quickly to see if anyone had witnessed what I’d done, but the coast was clear, so I fled, crow in hand (or in case).



Photo by Alex Laser

"Holy shit, boys! We have ourselves a natural born killer!" Adam applauded. Tod and Joe simply looked at each other in quiet admiration. "You, sir, will be a fine addition to Mayhem."

"So...I'm in?" I asked, feeling my chest puff.

"No. Not yet. But you passed the first test. In order to be officially in the gang, you have to win the second challenge."

"But...nobody else even got a crow!" I protested.

"Not true. Dusty brought us one this morning," Joe said, gesturing to a dark object near the Breheims' garage. And standing over the dark object, Dusty. And beside Dusty, Elaine.

Elaine! I can't let him win! She's mine!

I turned to Tod, who stood behind me. Gangly though he was, I felt like I could look him right in the eye with how I was feeling.

"What's next?"

"The field race!"

The field race was a once-around-the-block sprint with the winner making it to the third challenge. It occurred to me that with only two kids in contention to make the gang at this point, if the loser of the race was out, then there was only one person left. Who was that kid going to compete against in the third challenge? Why even have a third challenge? And who ever heard of a gang with one person in it? Is a captain still a captain if the captain is the only member of the gang?

"Are you boys ready?"

Dusty ambled over moonstruck.

"I was born ready," Dusty smugged.

"Let's do this," I added.

Kids were all gathered at the bottom driveway to cheer us on. As I looked around, I expected to see a lot more sadness from the boys (and Shelley) who hadn't made it to the second challenge, but if I'm being honest, they looked relieved and carefree. Here I was full of dread and doubt, even after I'd done the thing I'd been asked to do. And though I didn't want to do it, I had to risk losing the race and Elaine now, too? Nothing was adding up.

However, as Dusty and I had been best friends for years, I knew I was the faster runner, so I wasn't worried about the race, per se. What did bother me is how he'd even come to get a crow after it had been made so clear earlier that he didn't want to do it.

As we both stood at the finish lines and the cheers and cries around us bled into the general ambiance of a windy summer day, our eyes focused on Elaine, who stood in front of us with her t-shirt over her head, revealing her swimsuit top. If our testes hadn't dropped before then, they were down now. Our eyes were almost out of our heads. To be fair, Elaine is eleven, but with us being only eight, this was a big deal—in fact, there was no bigger deal in the history of humankind (as childhood goes).

"So...you killed yourself a crow finally," Dusty gloated.

"Yeah, with the slingshot. Two shots to the head. What did you do? Buy it at Richard's Market?" (I immediately regretted this statement as a series of "Ooohs!" and "Burn!" flew in from the crowd. I regret it not because it wasn't a clever thing to say, and Elaine's smile made clear she heard me and found it/me both daring and funny, but because Richard, who owned and managed Richard's, was a nice man, and as far as I could tell, only sold chicken and turkey as his winged meat options.)

"No, I killed it with Mike's BB gun. It was eating a dead rabbit down by the lake and never even knew I was there."

Mike is Dusty's oldest brother. It was a good move on his part—a clean kill and revealing of his mercilessness. I'd underestimated him. Or maybe this was an indicator he's willing to fight dirty. My nerves electrified my extremities, and I have a sudden desire to go to the bathroom (and no, not a number one...).

"Runners, are you ready?"

"Yes!" we shouted, focusing on Elaine who also showed off her slender arms. "Runners, are you set?"

"Yes!"

"Anything goes!" Adam shouted.

Wait, what? What does that even mean—

"Go!" Elaine shouted and let her tie-dye t-shirt fall to the street.

Dusty, who seemed emboldened by Adam's condition, shoved me sideways. I tripped over my own feet and fell to the ground. Spectators cheered. They were thirsty for blood.

After a few moments trying to right myself, I took off frantically, as Dusty had already cleared the corner. It was going to require more than just the speed I possessed, so as I ran in view of Dusty's surprisingly chubby child calves, I formulated a plan. "Anything goes" means the rules of racing are off the table—so if I need to cut him off, I can; if I need to trip him up, I will. In fact, being behind is an advantage of its own because you can't really plan an "attack" on the person behind you without turning around, and I knew Dusty's coordination was not his strong suit.

"How are you doing back there, loser?" Dusty taunted. It still surprised me how quickly he turned from my friend into someone who was trying to take not only my spot on a team, but my girl as well. 1+1=Anything Goes. Dusty turned the second corner onto Frost, and I knew this meant the race was half over. If he led after the third corner, I couldn't count on my adrenaline being enough, seeing as how Dusty had just as much to gain as I had, so I figured now is the time to make my move. The Dieters' driveway had an unusually steep dip that I wondered if Dusty knew about. Just after the driveway was a street sign in the grass that notified travelers of a pedestrian crossing at the next intersection. My plan: to take the inside track across the driveway, forcing Dusty to the outside. When the sign was imminent, I would shove him toward it so he's have to slow down to avoid the sign, giving me enough of a moment to get out in front. From there, I could trust my legs and speed to carry me to the finish.

Sure enough, the grass ending and driveway lip's steepness forced a stumble on Dusty while I turned on the speed, leaping over the lip to hit the driveway at its even part. Now side by side, the driveway at its end, I gave Dusty a slight shove, only Dusty hadn't fully recovered from his stumble, so the shove—combined with the stumble—sent him into the street sign. Head first. A sickening *dong!* reverberated as I took the lead and increased my distance. As I rounded the final turn onto Hazelwood again, I dared to look back to see what kind of a lead I'd built. What I saw: Dusty, on the ground, on his back, his hands holding his head, his shrieks reminding me of the squirrel I'd maimed years ago. I saw the finish line ahead, and kids standing there, cheering for me to claim my victory. Could I just leave Dusty there, bleeding? I mean, he shoved me first. And it was "Anything goes!"

I opted to finish the race. Secure the spot, then tend to the wounded.

"Little man takes the flag!" Joe said, high-fiving me as I crossed the Breheim driveway. Kids gathered around and cheered. Elaine was nowhere to be seen. I figured she'd be waiting there to hug me, to see who the better man was.

But my victory was short lived. First one person noticed, then several. Down the street, wobbling as he walked, sporting a shirt tie-dyed...in blood, Dusty howled so loudly people exited their homes to see what was the matter.

"What the hell happened!?" Tod yelled, running his fingers through his hair. The mass of fans moved toward Dusty down the street, and when we approached him is when we saw something that would make a strong stomach turn: a laceration so deep that we weren't sure if we were looking at bone, or brain.

"Dusty, what happened?" someone asked. Through an eye full of blood, Dusty let his gaze fall on me, then a bloody finger, dripping with derision as he made clear who did this to him.

“What the hell did you do, you fucking psycho?” Joe asked, making me feel less than yay tall.

How did this all of a sudden become my doing? I mean I know it could be viewed that way, but...

“But you told us ‘anything goes,’ and you *saw* him push me first! It’s not my fault he stumbled at the wrong moment!”

Just then some parents, recognizing the danger of the situation, forced the group to disperse. A siren already sounded in the distance.

“Everyone get out of here. Gang’s over!” Adam shouted, scuttling his fat ass up the driveway.

‘Gang’s over’? Like, game’s over? You can’t just call off a gang like a game of street hockey!

“But what about me!? I won!” I cried, my hands in imaginary victory pose.

“You just better hope you don’t go to jail!” Joe said, heading into his house as well.

As people helped Dusty to the curb to sit down and place pressure on the still oozing head wound, my head sunk in embarrassment and shame—but not before my gaze caught the figure of Elaine in the open living room window, her smirk letting me know what a fool I’d been to think it would have ended any other way.



A Piece Of Me

by Tyson Bailey

A piece of me is my mother's and my father's and their mothers' and fathers', by what they gave and what they showed and what they cherish and regret; another belongs to my siblings for why I love them now and all those things I hated them for growing up.

A piece of me is Halloween and Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter even though I'm not a Christian; and Independence Day because I used to love it and now it reminds me of all the lies I was told as a child.

Another piece of me is privilege, whether I felt privileged or not, and all the aspiring hillbillies I grew up around and everyone else that I didn't and how empty that seems to me now.

A whole bunch is best friend's from grade school and my worst enemy's from high school and everyone in between all of whom I wanted to like me, even if I didn't really want to like a lot of them, for the shallowest and silliest reasons

A piece of me is my theater director's and my band leader's and even Mr. Goodman from 3rd grade who we all knew wasn't really a good man (and neither was that joke, even for an 8 year old);

A piece of me is
Nintendo's and Sega's,
but only because I had
both.

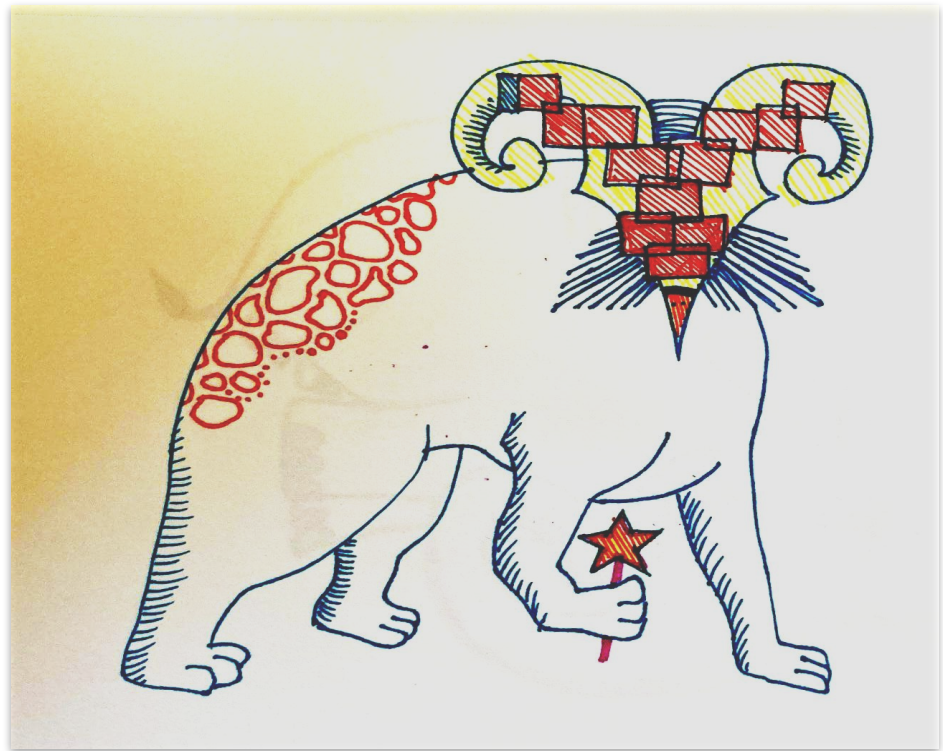
A piece of me is
Microsoft and Apple's,
even if I've never owned
an Apple product.

A piece of me belongs to
Pepsi and Coke, though
Pepsi was the choice of a
new generation when
mine was new, so Pepsi I
guess.

A piece of me is
Domino's and Pizza
Hut's and all the other
garbage chain pizza's because yeah, it's garbage, but it's pizza.

A piece of me is sex that always seems to be on sale, but isn't and really shouldn't be, but not for the reasons some might espouse.

A piece of me is Les Claypool's and Lupita Nyong'o's and David Mitchell's for the art they give; Ridley



Drawing by Denise Billings

Scott's and Ozzy Osbourne's and Alan Moore's for the art they gave; and Michael Bay's and Nickelback's for the art I find reliably repellent.

A piece of me is Harvey Weinstein's for my love of the films he produced and how tainted they joy they brought me is for the horrors they empowered him to commit

A piece of me is the Ninja Turtles' and the Power Rangers', though only the Turtles stood the test of time;

A piece of me is the uncountable number of times I have listened to Lateralus all the way through or watched just the first half of *The Mummy* with Brendan Fraser before I fell asleep;

The only part of me that I feel is mine is the piece of me that I have given of myself to others, both purposefully and not, in ways that I am proud and other that I am shamed.

Facing this Grand Equation and it's infinite variables and complexity, I can only resign my ignorance in dumbfounded awe, wanting to understand, and knowing that even that piece of me probably comes from somewhere else too.



Drawing by Denise Billings

A Year in the Life of a Library Teacher During a Pandemic (Continued)

by Erin Dalbec

Zoom yoga today
no deadly aerosols here
namaste at home

School, it's reinvented
the commute is great these days
but teaching is hard

Zoom research classes
encourage students to read
we all have down time

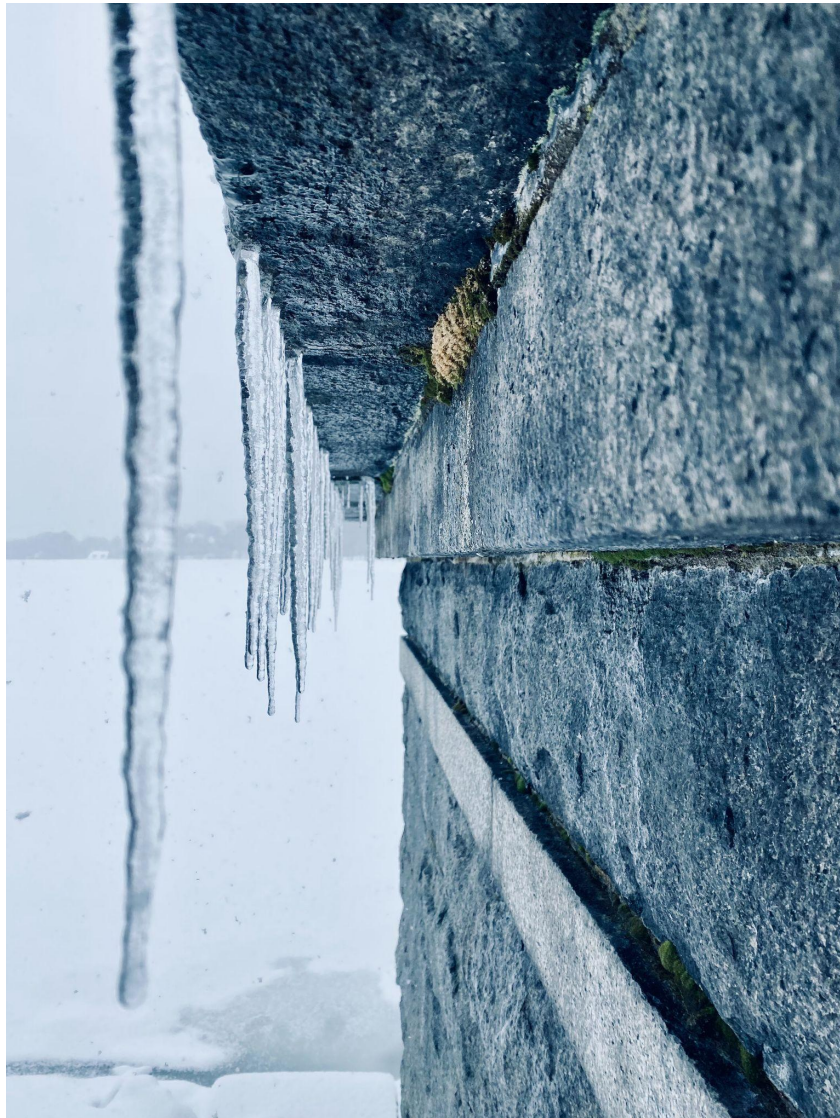


Photo by Cassandra Bell

Let's Move On

by Chris Wolf

Sitting in class
Well, not *in* class
But a collection of shapes
Kinda like desks,
But not really
Sharing but not sharing.
In this critical opportunity for
Pedagogy to respond critically

Examining identities overlapping
Well, their identities--but not mine
Because the people in the Loop office
That fell out of Wallpaper Magazine
Like one of those subscription cards
Keep asking us to
Be Vulnerable

I'm asking them
Were there any identity markers you left off the maps?
Burning holes in my corneas
Like Trump eyeing eclipses
I look at the hole in my map, *ahem*,
Start, stop and hesitate when

Looking at circles--
Still photos of hijabs &
Saint names

I stay silent,
Don't answer my own question
Leaving an obvious gap,
I say

Okay, turn your identity maps in. Let's move on.



**You gotta give that context, Johnny
(It's always Johnny.)**

by Maureen Kavanagh

Scattered Thoughts of a Teacher in a Pandemic

by Rafael Ibay

I'm sick of typing variations of I hope
this e-mail finds you well
ending with Best,
Mr. Ibay

What does that even mean?
"Best,"

Am I the Best?
My therapist says I should love myself.
So, you know what:
I guess I am the Best.

I must confess sometimes
in the Google Meet
I turn away from the sea of blank screens
and look outside my window
and I regard the trees
just to see something.

I really wanted to go to the car caravan downtown
to protest the re-opening of schools
but I was too exhausted from working until my body
aches
I suppose this is how
they keep us down.

I'm learning cool lingo though!
Apparently "DRIP" is the new term for stylish,
according to my students, the youth
who are the future.

In high school, I wore a lot of cargo shorts
and extra-large t-shirts from Old Navy with the one
horizontal stripe.
High school would've been a lot cooler if I was cool.

Man, I wish I was cool.

Wait.

Can they hear me?
Can anybody hear me?
Hello! Am I on mute?
Oh, shit. Yea, I am muted.

I cannot do one more long ass
Online COVID Safety Training.

I repeat: I cannot do one more long ass
Online COVID Safety Training.

Louder. For the admin in the back.
I cannot do one more long ass
Online COVID Safety Training.

That's it. That's the tweet.

Who has time anymore
for poetry?



Photo by Emily Lew

Espanglish Class

by Kel Lowndes

Here we go again. Time to talk to blank squares. Trying to hype myself because i hate what we're doing, there's no way these students will buy into it. Are they even learning anything?

MAS MAS MAAAAAAAS

Almost like a chant in the chat while students remain on mute. Simple verb conjugations for simple tense

"Con S or sin S"

Nothing exciting but still necessary. We ran through a couple vocabulary words.

Katty: MAAAAAAASMAAAAAAASMAAAAAAASMAAAAAAASMAAAAAAAS

More? More boring grammar? Really? Okay, i guess. I add a few more verbs for a new challenge.

"Okay, now you need to decide if the verb needs S, ES, or no S"

These brilliant freshmen quickly type on the shared google doc to complete the next section with only a few mistakes. Ok, so maybe there is a way to still get the collaboration needed for learning a language despite being so far apart over google meet.

Gervin: Mas

Gervin: Mas

Gervin: Mas

Gervin: Mas

I ask them, "Really? It seems like you know this. I think we are ready for the homework."

Josue: No, me gusta

"It's okay! You did good! We can do the homework. We don't need more practice.

Jonathan: Mas please

I'm confused. Do they want more to avoid the work or are they doubting their mastery.

"Porque? We finished. It's good."

With the help of google translate, Jonathan writes, *I like this activity because i can do it. I know how to do the english. I feel good when i can do the activity.*

My Spanish is mediocre at best, so it's nice that Jonathan translated into english for me.

Josue: También porque en otras clases maestros no ayuda y no entiendo. En esta

Katty and Gervin race to add ^^^^^^^^^^^^^ in the chat.

I lean back in my chair.

Armando who's been silent except for writing in the google document now writes, *En esta clase puedo hacer todo porque no es muy difícil y tú me ayudas. Los otros profesores no me ayudan y me siento estúpida.*

Fuck. I rush to say, "No! You are intelligent. Very intelligent. Look at you! Learning a second language. Very impressive.

In the before times students normally rush to talk over me when they disagree. In the remote times, they just keysmash over and over again over each other. The chat keeps moving as the no's flood the sidebar.

They continue to write how for other classes they sit and wait until another bilingual student can translate the class. They explain how Juan is nice and helpful but sometimes he doesn't want to translate because it's stressful. Gervin says he's scared of asking because he doesn't want people to think he's stupid. Katty says her bio teacher is nice but she gets bored waiting seventy minutes to ask for help. Jonathan says it's hard to do the homework with so little time because he has to translate everything.

My heart breaks. These great kids are being so vulnerable. It's beyond clear they want to participate but are so afraid. I know that some teachers are so overwhelmed by huge class sizes mostly filled with native English speaking students and our principal has offered no valuable PDs to support. But this moment isn't about what the teachers are feeling. It's about these 5 students who moved from Central and South America during a pandemic who just want to feel like they can do something. We continue to talk about what we should learn in English class. They said the vocabulary is good because they can practice. They explain how I should only give them some work together and always make the homework independent so they test what they've learned. They tell me how the bulletin board features in the presentations are cool because they add pictures in case they forget the English word. It's almost like these students are trying to hype me up instead of the other way around. I ask if they need help in other classes.

SI
si
SHIIIIIIIIII
porfa!

I sigh. Well, I guess it's okay if we don't get to the homework today. Sometimes we just need a chance to breathe. I can't imagine being in their place. They start sharing their homework with me, and we jump between math, bio, PE, and history. I ask if they understand the instructions for the various assignments with due dates long passed. They say yes, and ask if class is over. I tell them, yes. Puedes salir.

Katty: *Gracias! Espanglish class is cool!*
I ask "Espanglish? Is that like Spanish and English class?"

Katty: *Mas or menos. No se. good by.*



Photo by Emily Lew

Spanish Has Always Been a Distant Relative

by Jenni Morreale

Spanish has always been a distant relative.

Someone I know from faded photos and only visits on holidays.

Spanish smells like *sancocho* and tastes salty like the *tostones* we have on the rare occasion mom cooks *arroz con pollo*.

Spanish is abuelas *empanadas*; the ones she forgot how to make, but managed in the lightning strike of a lucid moment to pass down the recipe to mom and Jess.

Spanish is the three of us, in an assembly line, making crescent moon shaped patties--talking about how "You and Annie weren't raised Spanish. *I* was raised Spanish," But never actually speaking Spanish.

Annie is the Italian one, we say. But Italian is even further away-an ocean away- and died with my grandparents. My dad can speak Russian

And Hebrew

And proper English because he was never burdened with a foreign tongue. But he can't speak the language of his ancestors.

And maybe that's why, he feels so far away from us.

I speak English. Nah. New York English.

"Like deadass, it's mad brick out, bro" English.

Like *Cawfee* for breakfast and baconeggcheeseketchupsaltpepper-

One word. Say it fast, or it doesn't count.

The only language I ever knew, I swallow it whole when I speak in front of "Wicked cool" students. Try to enunciate every word; like my life depends on if I can pronounce autonomy- But my tongue coils. And fights back.

And Brings back my stutter from fifth grade.

All these half languages I know sprinkle across my words.

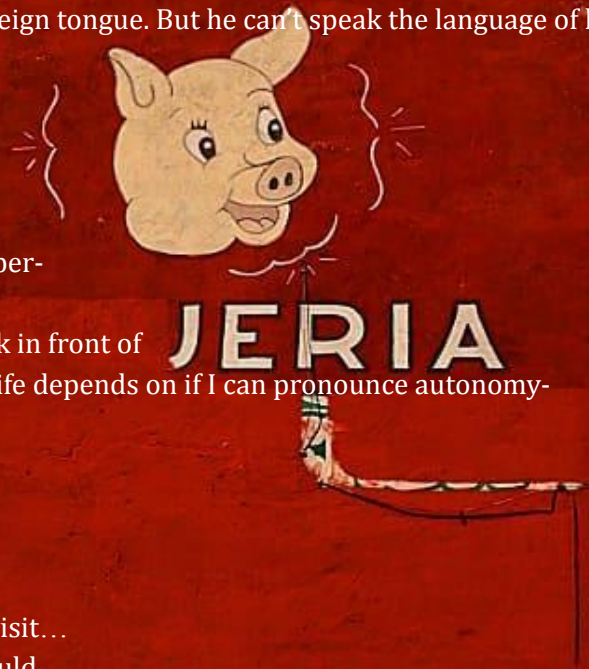
Buried under the quiet in my tone.

Make me wish I got to know Spanish more when she came to visit...

Or my dad's memory wasn't so clouded by liquid poison, he could

Remember how to speak Russian, or Hebrew, or even Italian.

And I feel my accent fading the longer I stay in a place that doesn't always feel like home.



lengua de cerdo by Alex Laser

A Year in the Life of a Library Teacher During a Pandemic (Continued)

by Erin Dalbec

I spend my weekends
cutting, pinning, sewing masks
for neighbors and friends

Build care packages
addressed to my family
letters, masks, trinkets

A post office clerk
reprimands lady in line
for not wearing mask

Mutual aid group
community supported
We help each other

Fear, resides inside
my psyche-- I can't shake it
arm myself with facts

Take my daily temp
search for the daily Mass. stats
test my sense of smell



Drawing by Denise Billings



Control

by Kel Lowndes

I know
the cleanliness of my toilet
the order of songs in my playlist
the scent of the living room
the meals prepped (or not)

I try to predict my
bedtime
mood
motivation
patience
students' mood, motivation, patience

I don't even attempt to guess
time or length car alarms or sirens will be blaring
why my roommate is yelling
How Chicago's weather will be raging

If I learned anything from this past year
It's that I never as much control
so
I give it up.

The Alarm Clock

by Tyson Bailey

I have a digital alarm clock,
with a built in cassette deck,
that I've had since I was ten years old.
Outside of my family,
it might be the longest relationship I have
with any single tangible thing

Every morning, at 5:30,
It screams it's terrible, inorganic scream.
And I get up, walk to my dresser,
smack it in the head and go back to bed,
ignoring it's dutiful service and dire warning
that I'm going to oversleep and ruin my day.

Sometimes, I awake at the appropriate time,
only to find it sitting silent.
No "EEAAGGHH, EEAAGGHH, EEAAGGHH!!!",
just refusing to perform its solemn duty,
with only the red glowing digits
telling me it is still alive.

My wife's alarm is the Super Sonic theme
from Sonic the Hedgehog 2.
It plays from her phone and sounds great.
I could have done something similar years ago,
but rely on my old, outdated, offensive friend.
Out of habit? Laziness? Loyalty?

I forgive it these rare miscues
because it is old and has served me well
for over two and a half decades.
It'll work again tomorrow,
Until it doesn't,
and the shock of its absence no longer wakes me.

I don't think miss it when it's gone,
like so many other things I've already lost,
yet it persists all the same,
like so many other things
I wouldn't mind discarding
if only I didn't really have to actually do it.



treeple, pt. 1 by Alex Laser

Dancing In The Streets

by Kel Lowndes

Can you dance when your feet don't touch the ground?
well, sure my feet touch the ground sometimes. To stop, start, pull over, lock up.
There's a rhythm to it all
There's rhythm of the music, Queue the B is for Bike Mix
carefully curated to keep energy high in a blazing heat hitting your neck in an attempt to burn it
whipping winter wind, attacking any skin exposed to elements
There's a rhythm to it all
Foster northbound left turn first, so don't cut through the red light on
Touhy westbound flips fast, so watch the pedestrian light to gage if you can cross the Western Ave great
divide
Montrose's never ending construction under the L has made the drivers generous in sharing the lane
Clark is a constant flow of cars creeping closer as they cruise along side, begging, almost pleading for those
extra inches of space
Space, that if I give I will be running into a parked car
So you let the cars lead. Let them set the pace. Especially near any highways. You follow.
There's a rhythm to it all
Assess if you like the pace, decide if you should call out "On your left", and commit
Pick up the pace to snake around them before the Nissan behind takes you out.
There's a rhythm to it all
Even the bike joins in with percussion, the rattling of the U-lock bouncing against the uneven paths
the side bag bumping against the metal rack with every pothole I roll over.
It's the kind of dance
that's care-free, to dance away the problems of the day
to dance away the incessant nagging of the dumpster fire of the world
to spin away into a place where the only thing that exists is the road in front of you
and maybe to your left



Wicker Park, Chicago: 606 Bike Trail by Denise Billings

A Year in the Life of a Library Teacher During a Pandemic (Continued)
by Erin Dalbec

In May, we protest
the fight for Black lives seems to
ignite overnight

We Carry the Weight

by Felicia Prass

On our backs
to be told to wait our turn.
When will that be?? Huh?
Like, is it not I, me, we that bleed continuously?

Your palms, red like evil.
I'm fucking done with this shit.
Ready to ride out. Never been born to quit.
Our souls reverberate coded messages that try to heal us,
but when we are time again
riddled with bullets,
bullet point this:
God
Is
Watching
Us
From
A
Distance

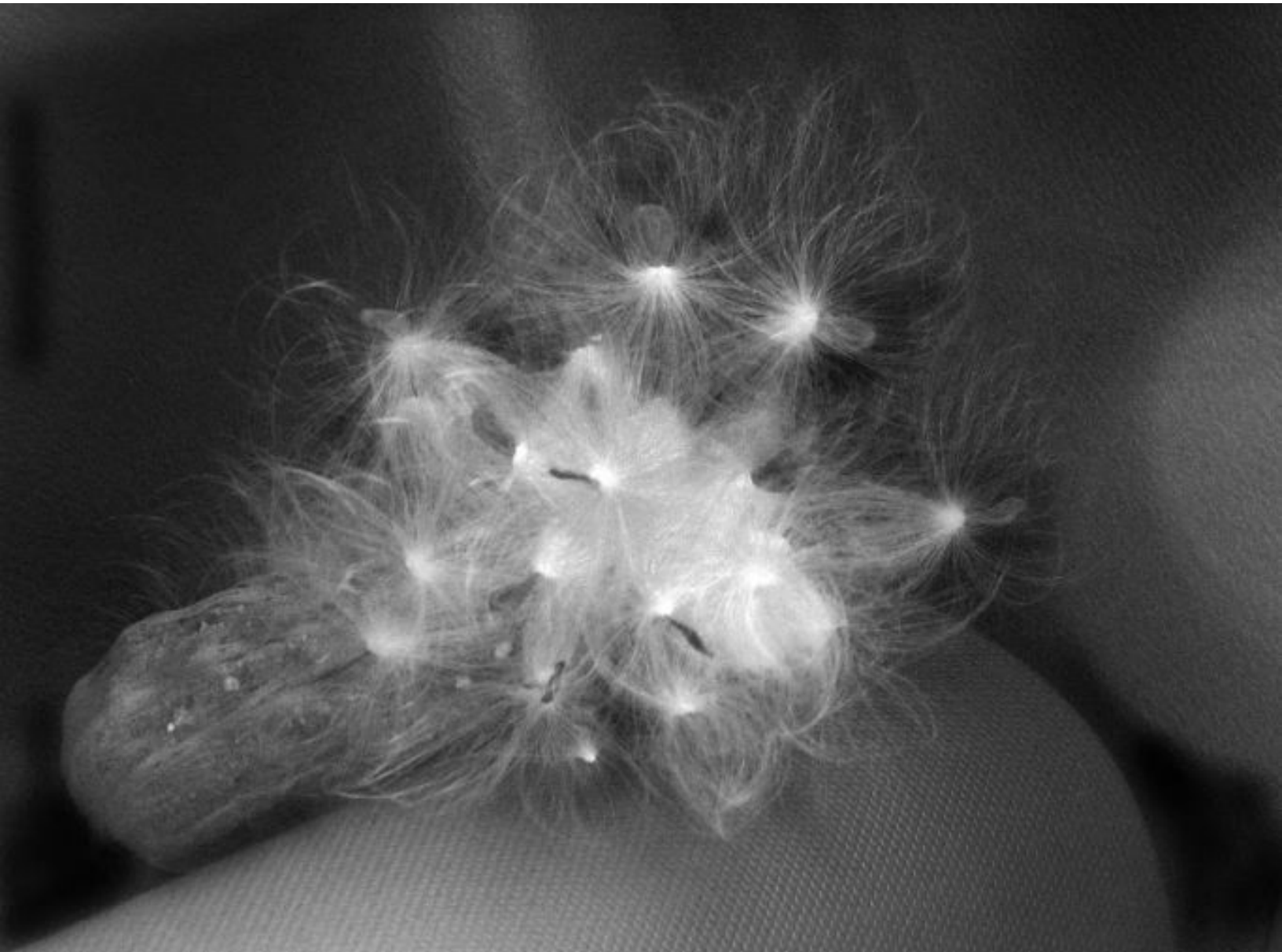
My existence is the bitter sweet resistance.
Breathing while black.
In this land.

Fed up, that is.

A Year in the Life of a Library Teacher During a Pandemic (Continued)

by Erin Dalbec

Hate hath no home here
it's a generational
crescendo of love



Milkweed Fly by Maria Ambre

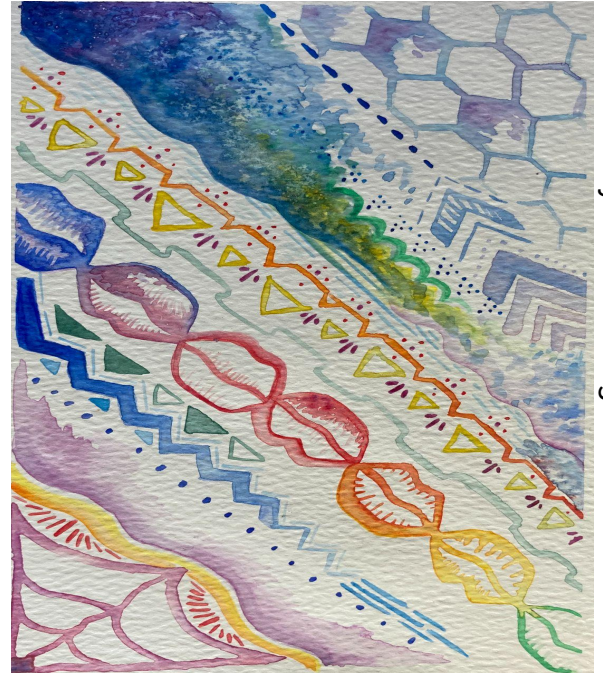
White Girls in the Bathroom

by Madeline Kobayashi

Mrs. La Luz says my speech is really good
It's so good she says I should enter it in a speech contest
I don't know what a speech contest is
She says it's this event where a bunch of middle school
Kids read their speeches to a group of judges and then they get scored
I don't know if my speech is good enough for judges

But I love Mrs. La Luz
She's Puerto Rican, like me
She owns a house and wears chunky necklaces and
earrings that look like little pieces of art
Dangling from her ears when she walks around
the class and leans over your
shoulder and puts her hand on your back and oohs
and aahs about how good your writing is
She is proud to be Puerto Rican
And plays salsa music when it's writing time

So I tell Mrs. La Luz okay, I'll do the speech contest thing, even though
I have no idea what that means
The contest is on an early Saturday morning
Which is a pain in the ass because my family doesn't wake up early
on a regular day and definitely not on Saturdays
So I have to beg Papi to drive me all the way to Gordon Tech,
And I have to be there by 9am Mrs. La Luz says,
Otherwise they won't let me compete because I'll miss registration
Papi is pissed, but he drives me anyway
I have no idea what to wear to a speech contest so I wear the nicest outfit I have: a jean dress
with a lavender short-sleeved button-down, making sure I press the collar over the denim straps
I don't have fancy shoes to go with my dress so I wear the only shoes I have
Off white Pro Wings with pink and baby blue stripes
Except they're really dirty so I scrub them with a wet rag the night before
We get to Gordon Tech High School a couple minutes after 9 and Papi just drops me off in front
So he can go park the car
I run into the building, not really knowing where I'm going
And Mrs. La Luz is right there, waiting next to the table that says Registration
"Come here mi'ja!" she says with her arms extended for a hug



Watercolor by Denise Billings

She must know how nervous I am
I'm just glad she's not mad at me for being late
She helps me get registered and walks me to the classroom where all
the other kids are
The room is so crowded and I'm the last person walking in
So everyone just looks at me
Kids are on one side and all the adults on the other
I lower my eyes a bit because Mami taught me that's it's not polite
to stare
So I try to be sneaky and scan the room
I don't think I've ever seen a room filled with so many white faces
All the kids are white
That's it, I think
I'm gonna lose this contest
There's no way my speech will be as good as these kids



Drawing by Denise Billings

The first kid goes up there and I can't even follow what he's saying because I'm practicing my speech in my head, trying to memorize as much of it as possible so I can look at the audience when I'm reading, like Mrs. La Luz taught me
Then this one girl gets up there and starts explaining how horrible AIDS is
She uses the biggest, fanciest scientific terms I've ever heard a kid use
And I don't even know what she's talking about
At that point I think I should tell Papi we should sneak out during intermission
I could make something up about having cramps or something and he'd probably be happy because he looked like he was falling asleep anyway
Mrs. La Luz interrupts my plan as soon as they announce intermission
She walks over to me and says, "Mija, let's take a quick bathroom break. You're gonna be up next."
Now all of a sudden I really do have those cramps I was planning to lie about
I don't wanna be up next, but I don't know how to tell Mrs. La Luz
We walk to the bathroom and it's filled with a bunch of white girls,
one of them was the AIDS speech
I go into the stall even though I don't really have to pee, but Mrs. La Luz did and I didn't wanna just stand there by the stall waiting for her
After a few seconds I figure it's safe to come out, Mrs. La Luz will be done soon and maybe those white girls will be gone too
When I step out of the stall, they're still there.

And maybe it's just me, but I feel like they're staring at me
They're staring at my gym shoes and my jean dress and maybe it's just me but they have this
nasty look on their faces
Mami told me it's not polite to stare so I try not to stare back at them, and instead I look down at
my gym shoes and jean dress
I thought my dress was cute and the button down shirt was fancy
But then I look at what they're wearing and I start to see what they see
I start to see myself like they see me
And suddenly I wished I had stayed in the stall a little longer because now I just want to run back
in there and hide
I don't do anything but stand there, with my stomach in knots, not knowing what to do
Mrs. La Luz finally comes out of her stall and rushes to the sink
"Come on, mija, we gotta go! You're next!"
But I don't want to move. I don't want to walk back into that classroom so everyone else
Can stare at my jean dress and gym shoes and know we don't have money like they do
Mrs. La Luz has her arm around me and we're walking toward the classroom and I'm not strong
enough to turn and run the other way
I'm sitting down and then I hear them call my name
"Madeline Rolon is next, reading her speech 'Living in the Zone'"
Everyone claps as I move toward the podium, those phantom cramps squeezing my insides
And I think God is punishing me for thinking about lying my way out of this speech
I put my speech on the flat surface of the podium and realize it's hard to read the
Handwritten cursive words in turquoise ink
When I wrote it I wasn't thinking about reading it in front of a group of white people
When I wrote it I was thinking about telling Mrs. La Luz how fucked up gangs are in case
She didn't know
I start reading and even though I want to make eye contact with the audience like Mrs. La Luz taught me
I'm afraid to look at the white girls from the bathroom
Because if they're making the same face they made in that bathroom
I'm not gonna make it through this speech
So instead I try to keep my eyes in Mrs. La Luz's direction
And the whole time she's got the biggest smile I've ever seen and her earrings are bouncing
above her shoulders as she nods her head back and forth, each nod telling me "YES"
Keep going, keep reading
So I do, my voice getting louder with each line, shaking, trembling
As I talk about Donald and Froggy and all the other boys I've seen get caught up in the gangs
As I compared living in Humboldt Park to living in the Twilight Zone

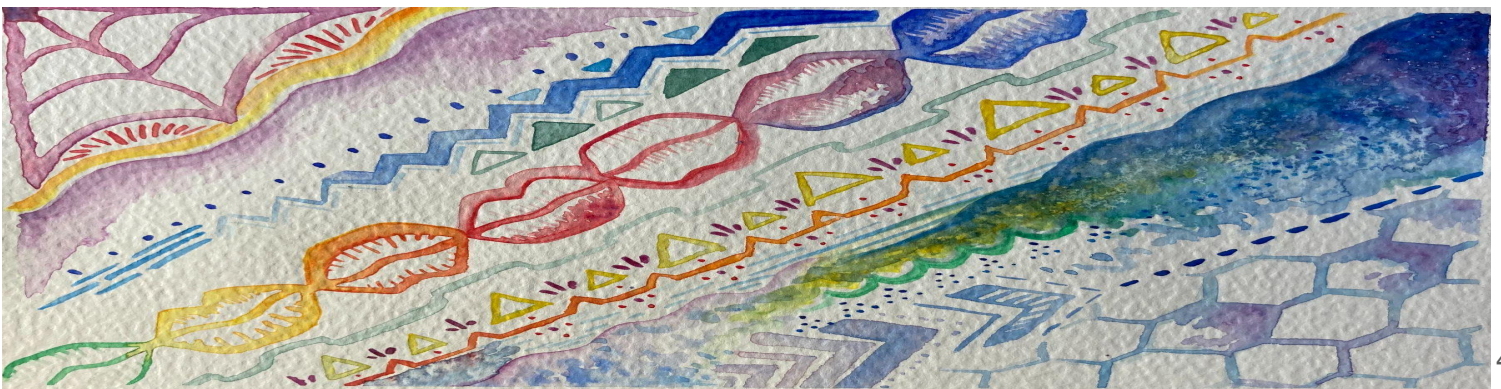
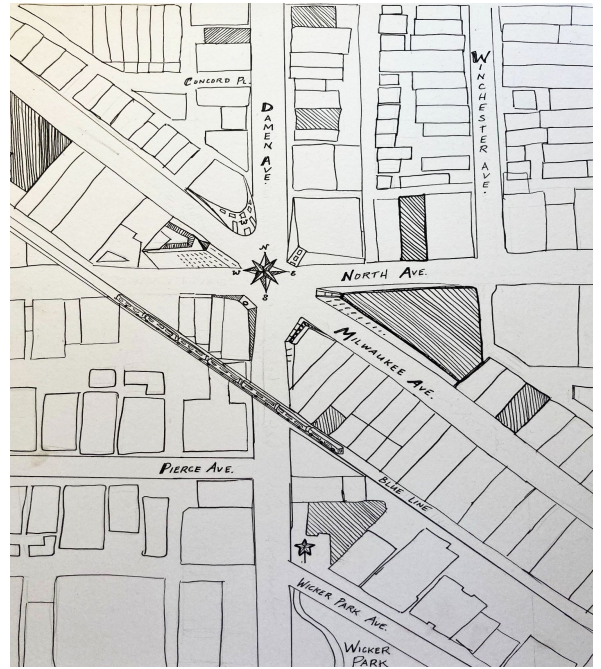
At the last few lines I work up the courage to look over at the
white girls from the bathroom
And force myself to hold their gaze as I read the last lines
So they know what it's like to live in Humboldt Park
What it's like to be me
When I finish I can't believe it's over
Everyone claps and Mrs. La Luz rushes towards me and
wraps me in her arms, her earrings
brushing against my cheek
"Mi'ja, I'm so proud of you," she whispers in my ear.

They announce the scores at the end, and I'm trying to tell myself it
doesn't matter
I made Mrs. La Luz proud, that's all that matters

"AIDS by Ashley Stephens, Superior."
"Living in the Zone by Madeline Rolon, Superior."

I don't even hear anyone else's score
I don't care
I got the same score as the AIDS speech. I was stunned.

Mrs. La Luz gives me the kind of hug that lifts me off my feet
She asks Papi if she can take me out to celebrate and he says of course
We go to McDonalds and then an arts and crafts expo in Rosemont
Mrs. La Luz buys me a necklace that's engraved with my initials
And then she takes me home
I tell my sisters about the speech and the score and McDonalds and the arts and crafts expo
But I don't tell them about the white girls in the bathroom.



Ode to My Students

by CrystalLennix

March 8, 2021

Ode to my students
my kiddos, my babies.
You find the strength to wake up
before 8am to see the
blackened screens, little squares
and the one colorful background.



Photo by Shaiqi Hu

For some, I have never
had the honor of seeing
your faces. But I have had
the honor of
seeing your spirit.

You are whimsical and majestic.
Show me a pandemic
and I'll show you twenty-seven
students who took it and
swallowed it whole--
who made a rainbow
out of thunder.

Tell me, what kind of combination
of melanin, magic, and glitter
caused such brilliance
when so many are consumed
in darkness?

A Year in the Life of a Library Teacher During a Pandemic (Continued)

by Erin Dalbec

I'm a masked rider
bike like a superhero
but without a cape!



bad day by Alex Laser

Cycling

by Alex Laser

Then, the car hit me. One second, I'm swerving, narrowly missing a bus. It spews hot exhaust in my face. The next, my hands leave my handlebars. I levitate off my seat. I spin backward. My legs pulled inward, like an astronaut doing crunches in zero gravity. As I reach the zenith, a catch releases and my body springs outward. I arch my back, like a yogi bridging, fingertips reaching for Earth but finding instead naked air. As I lean my head backwards, and see not sky, but the black asphalt.

What happens next looks something like this. First, my helmet tags the pavement. The neon eggshell harboring my cerebellum cracks against the skillet of the road. Kinetic shockwaves travel down my spine, my body graphing a cosine above the axis of the road. My butt bounces, bruising my left ass cheek so deep I won't sit right for a month. The street tears hole the size of a quarter in the rear pocket of my jeans, in inverse mockery of the power of the collision. The tidal wave of force carries my feet to the ground, flopping like dead fish on a boat deck. My ricocheting neurons pulse from feet to brain, breathlessly signaling: "Brace yourself!" It's too late. My slinky body slows still. My mortal coil rests.



The back of my eyelids crack to the blue-black of a Chicago October morning. I stare at the cloudless dawn. The chilled wet air tickles my nose, foreshadowing the bone aching cold of my first long Chicago winter. I feel, not...pain. No. I feel comfort. Overwhelming comfort. Thoughts that one would expect after being hit by a car -- Am I okay? What just happened to me? What now? -- are awash like the roaring tides of the passing traffic. Here, on the ground, a solidness enwraps my body. The emptiness hum of the road soothes my mind.

Only moments before, my mind was peddling, shifting, grinding, derailing -- ever aware of the race against the watch on my wrist. In the moment before impact, my mind would have looked something like this...

5:45: Turn North on Clark Street. Here I'd enter the final 2 mile stretch of biking. The only uphill in the entire 7 miles of Chicago pancake flatness from Wicker Park to Edgewater.

5:59: Approach rear entrance. Remove fob. I'd unclip the fob from my jeans loops and hover it over the red light on the sensor at the rear of the building

6:00: Green light. Unlock doors. Not a moment too soon or late, I'd heave open the rusted peptic pink double doors.

6:05: Arrive at the Main Office -- provided that I didn't once again beat Gale, the ornery front desk clerk and jingoistically proud, red-blooded Irish American, to unlocking the office door.

6:10: Attempt to exchange unreciprocated pleasantries with Gale. Punch in. -- CPS makes us punch in like factory workers. Not subtle. Why try to hide that public education was a sawmill? Our minds, logs for the conveyor belts.

6:15: Arrive teachers lounge, Room 222 -- Stride through the colossal empty Beaux Arts halls of the fourth largest building in Illinois. No easy feat.

Here, in 222, I could pause in the unventilated, overheated silence of the converted, former dance studio. The fiberboard computer table here straddles the closed doors that hide the full-length performance mirrors. While punching my ID and password into the computer, I could catch a faint glimmer of myself in the mirror, a faint enshadowed line of silver between the door slats. As the color wheel cycled on the PC, loading my account, I would stare vacantly from corner to corner of the room: first at the crusty, staff microwaves; to unreplenished class supply stand; then to the anachronistic pay phone attached to the wall. I had picked up the receiver once in boredom found to my astonishment a ringtone. If the phone ever rang, would I dare to pick it up? In the brief peace, I would catch my breath and allow myself -- for approximately 59 seconds -- to recover from my daily morning bicycle odyssey.

I'd snap to attention when, inevitably, , Mr. Stephanopolous, the classroom veteran of forty-something years, would stroll in reeking of cigarettes. He would begin copying mammoth stacks of science packets. I couldn't help but wonder if these tomes of multipurpose paper were being lost by students on purpose, as he claimed, or simply disappeared into the interdimensional black hole that seemed to exist at the bottom of every student's book bag. Mr. Stephanopolous would mash some numbers on the control pad of the antique 80s Rizzo copier, which would begin spewing out hot rectangles of ink and pulp, dashing my reverie. I'd open dropbox and resume the rush.

6:30: Shift gears. In 30 minutes flat, I would proof my power points, tweak my templates, oil my objectives. All stains of subjectivity and mediocrity would be buffed away.

7:00: Bolt to the Xerox machine. Just in time to beat the Card Carrying (with a capital C-C) members of the Teacher's Union as they began to file in, reeking of stress and skepticism. I would feed my collated master copies to the Xerox god, a ritual sacrifice that had been practiced and honed to precision. Barring an ink shortage or paper jam, I could have my pristine packets stapled, stacked, and sorted by 7:15.

7:20: Unlock classroom. Entering, I would survey my room in the half-light of the morning. There's the hole in the wall from Tyler's head, when he leaned back too far while falling asleep in class. There by the intake vent, would be the daily multiplying mass of the accumulated skin and dirt particles of over a century of the American public education experiment. Here, in the crevice for the intercom wires, would be the home of Cheetoh the Mouse. Cheetoh, my friend during the lonely and too far away hours of 7th period lunch, when my classroom finally stood empty for the first time since the morning.

No doubt Cheetoh was sleeping peacefully, gorged on the crumbs left by yesterday's surreptitious chip snackers. I'd recall how on the previous day, Ola, the custodian and recent Romanian immigrant, once again complained of her back pain as she emptied my trash can and promptly left without sweeping. I didn't have the emotional fortitude to ask her again to sweep and be greeted with cringy statements about "these kids" having no respect, or perplexing racist insinuations that: "That black science teacher, his kids never leave crumbs on his floor."

I could glance at my watch and make a gambit. Spend a precious 10 minutes sweeping the room, or start rearranging the desks and putting up my objectives?

Not wanting to make that decision...

7:25: Brew Coffee. I would stall and brew a Keurig at my coffee station tucked behind my bookshelf of pedagogical books, a fire-code violation on several counts.

7:30: Haul ass. With about 15 minutes until kids started to arrive, I would once again skip the dusting and start getting my room in order. It was usually about this time that I noticed a glaring typo on my pristine handouts. A few deep breaths, and a prayer to my anti-anxiety medication, might hopefully sustain me. I would glance nervously at the chair where just two months prior, my seniors had sat me down after a nervous breakdown in front of my first class on the first day at my new school. The medicine was working these days, pumping hard against the steep incline of my nerves, but my mind, forced on this tandem bike ride refused to help pedal it seemed.

7:45: Bell rings. With whatever remaining seconds of childless isolation I had, I could survey my pods of desks, my stacks of copies, my steaming coffee in a “Shakespearean Insults” mug. It’s only then that I might have allowed myself to remember that Assistant Principal Morales’s informal observation of my class was scheduled for Fourth Period. Worried? Not I! There would be no nervousness for that. The ceaseless throb of hot adrenaline in my capillaries drummed a beat that my body would dance. My mouth would sing the lofty lyrics of enlightened pedagogy: objectives, data, do now, exit ticket. My soul would slump.

7:46: Door opens. A student would casually pop in and plop their bag down on the table, and like a wind up toy, I would release my crank to be carried on the momentum of elastic tension.

Yes, this was the train of plans and premonition that rotated through my mind, as I swerved to dodge the CTA bus, only seconds later being tossed like a stuffed animal into the air by the hood of an accelerating car. Now, as I lie on the asphalt, gravel pricking my skin, these thoughts are temporarily exterminated. I sit between the curb and the faded white line of the bike lane, the chalk outline to the crime scene that is my life. But for now, I only want to pull the black tar around myself like waking up under a weighted blanket on a sluggish Saturday morning.

A harsh cry splits me. .

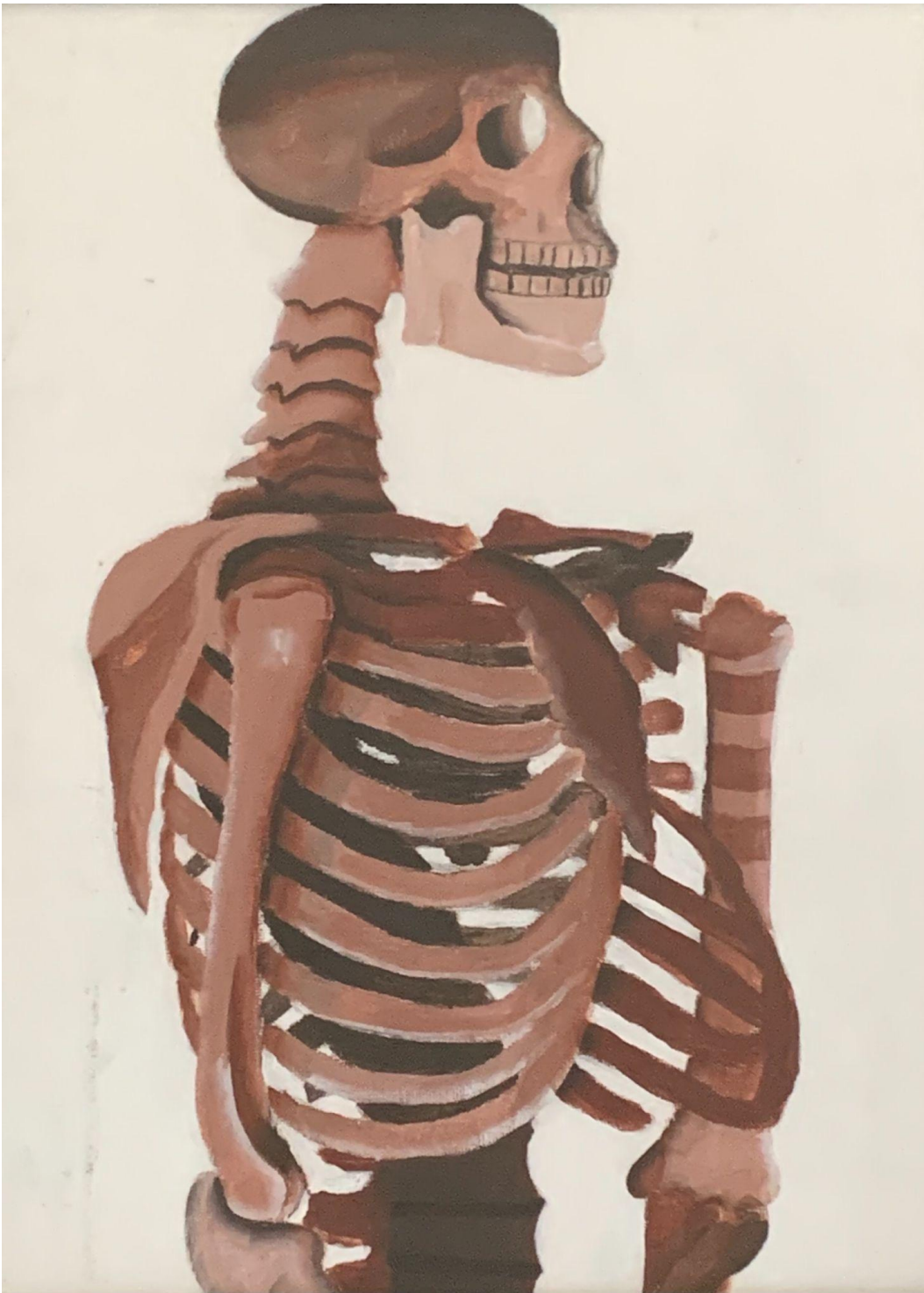
“Oh my God. Oh my GOD!” the alarmed voice shouts. A panic stricken voice of a pedestrian, mingled with fear. I certainly must have looked dead. The cry snagged me like a fishhook and yanked my floppy head upright, chin first. As blood rushes to my rattled cranium, it carries with it my senses and also my own personal brand designer drug -- adrenaline. The volcanic hormone wells in my feet, pumsd through my chest, then erupts into my skull and out my mouth in a choked scream.

“What the fuck!” I rasp. My voice doesn;t sound like my own. I still don’t know why I’m on the ground, but I know that only expelitives can aptly describe my situation. And they need to be louder.

“What the FUUUUUUCK!” I screech with added volume, to no one in particular, but becoming dimly aware of the outlines of spectators in my periphery. Although my voice still cracks, I have to imagine my performance matches my situation more aptly this time.

The adrenaline wills me to my feet, but too quickly. The searing pain in my left buttock topples me forward, and I unsteadily reel my way to the curb, like an undead soldier of a zombie horror flick. Placing my right cheek down on the sidewalk, only then do I look up to survey the scene.

A trail of broken glass and rubber streaks leads my eyes to my black and yellow Panasonic 12-speed. The rear wheel is folded flat in half like a taco. The triangular frame corkscrews upwards to a twisted handlebars. The angled front wheel spins ridiculously amidst the debris of a car. My gaze follows a new trail of broken plastic to the rusty red Camry parked at a hasty angle to the roadside.



A fragment of a memory tells me that this was the red Camry I had seen nosing its way into traffic, straddling the driveway to the Shell station directly across the street, not one minute ago. To my utter horror, I see this same car now tilted forward resting on the flattened remains of a punctured front tire. The Camry's side mirror dangles helplessly from a wire against the russet side door. Looking at myself in the tiny silver triangles of shattered mirrors against the tar, I start to breath again.

The door of the Camry pops open. A young Black woman, not much older than me, in a red and orange crochet cap, jerks from the car. She rushes toward me in slow motion. There's a look of mortal dread in her eyes that pass from me, to the skeleton of my bike, to her car. I follow her eyes back to myself and look down at my hands. My mind starts to twirl. Them momentum picks up. I can't stop it. I'm spinning and spinning ridiculously. There's no brakes.

I should be dead.

Dead. Dead! Oh my God, I'm so dead.

If I don't go to work today, I'll have to reschedule my observation with Mr. Morales.

If I reschedule my observation, my students won't complete their outlines by Thursday.

If they don't complete their outline, their draft won't be done by Monday.

If they're not done by Monday, our unit won't be finished by November.

If we don't start The Odyssey by November, we won't start the essay by Thanksgiving.

My God...

I won't even be done by Winter Break!

There's no way this woman, the driver, leaning forward on her toes, waiting for me to speak, can possibly imagine the hellscape that was mapping itself on my mind. Could she possibly envision the invisible digital calendar that all teachers carry with them? This calendar -- more invasive than a smartphone; with push notifications that skip your ocular nerves and move straight to your cortisol centers; able to induce more insomnia faster than the blue lights of a phone screen; one that play before your eyes like Google Glasses as we stare up at the dark ceiling at night. Could she guess?

As I try hopelessly to click "X" on the dozens of open mental tabs in my brain browser, the young woman hesitantly asks, "Are you okay? Oh my God. Please be okay. I'm so sorry. Soooo so sorry."

In her voice, something finally breaks through my wall. I hear the anxiety of a human being concerned for another human being's life, overlaid by the inexorable calculus that any interracial interaction in a America will prescribe. She no doubt knows that she had just RUN OVER a young white man from behind, in a bike lane, in Chicago, a city not known for police forgiveness toward Black mistakes. Even in my unhinged state, I recognize her predicament too and want to do my best to allay her fears of miscarried justice.

One of the pedestrian witnesses hovering nearby, a light skinned Black man in running gear, walked up to intercede. His abs and pecs visible through his skin tight blue shirt, mock my stooped, single-asscheek-sitting form. After checking that I'm okay, and checking in with the woman emotionally, he gives us his number.

"I saw everything," he remarks. "You can give me a call if you need a report." Together, the three of us piece out what happened.

The woman had indeed been leaving the Shell station across Lawrence Avenue. The puzzle piece clicked into place. The woman had pulled out in front of oncoming traffic, whipped a wide turn into the opposite lane, still looking over her shoulder as she found her way into the bike lane and then, into me.

As I look again at the scene, I know I should be dead. I had somehow done more damage to her car than she had done to my body. Wanting to exchange information, my hand goes to my back pocket to grab my wallet, to find leather sticking out of the perfectly circular hole that's formed there. This tiny cloth scar seems to be the only physical evidence on my person that anything even happened here. A theory ventured by our pedestrian friend is that since I was totally blindsided by the collision, my body had no chance to react and hence, didn't convulse before impact. My limp figure was little more than a rubber dummy to the road. The simple state of ignorance may have saved my life.

The woman pulls nervously at the edges of her knit hat. "I'm so sorry. So so sorry," she pleads. Her name is Sharon. She had only just moved here from rural Georgia a few weeks ago and was not used to big city driving. As an untethered expat from the east coast myself, I grasp onto this detail of relatability like a life raft. In my disoriented state, I need empathy and connection with this woman even more than her cell phone number.

I look her in the eye, and tell her it's okay. To be honest, I have plenty of reasons to be empathetic with her conundrum. My affinity for biking aside, I understood the risks. I had seen the crazy helmetless hipsters blaze down Milwaukee Avenue with reckless abandon. I saw city bike share riders teeter menacingly into traffic without second thought. Not a month before, a cyclist had been killed on my route at Addison and Damen, the flowers strung to the lamppost were a daily *memento mori* while riding. On the flipside, as a driver in Chicago, I sometimes felt that I was playing an awful depopulation lottery, worthy of Shirley Jackson. One day I would get in the car to find that my number was up, and it would be the day that I took down a cyclist. I feel no animosity toward this woman.

"I'm a teacher," I offer absurdly. It's my go to whenever I want someone to trust me. Whatever else the costs of teaching, at least one of the few perks is you can usually put someone at ease when you say that. The comment seems to give her some relief. If she had known my mounting concern for that day's lesson on outlining, she might not have found it a comfort.

A teacher? My lessons. My lessons! I need to get to school. Must get to school. The bad coding takes over my brain. I hobble to my feet. The bruise on my ass has cooled somewhat, but my legs feel slow like my jeans were stuffed with sand bags. I take the woman's card, set it in my wallet, which I tuck back into ripped pocket. The pedestrian traffic has resumed at this point, and the cars which had pulled over to inspect are cleared away on their morning commute. Sharon and the Good Samaritan remain. I assure them that I'm okay.

No, I don't need to go to the hospital. No, I'm good to walk. (It's true. I could walk just fine.) Yes, I swear I'm alright. (Not alright in the head.) I'll just take the bus, thank you.

I pick the carcass of my Panasonic, heave it on my shoulder and head for the vertical axis of Clark Street. I call my wife Erin at the bus stop, still not used to my alien quavering voice, as I leave a voicemail: "Yeah, it's me. Uh look. So, I'm okay. But something happened. Yeah, um, call me right away... I'm okay though." I sound pretty unconvincing. I hang up.

The 22 CTA Bus pulls up to the stop. The pistons woosh as the doors swing open. The driver's face is turned straight ahead. Through his shades, he glances sideways at me.

"No bikes on the bus," he growls.

I lift my limp bike like a sacrificial lamb, and bellow: "I'M HAVING A BAD DAY."

The driver turns his head to look at me and immediately springs backward in the cushy seat. Without a word, he averts his gaze from my deranged eyes and hikes a thumb to the rear of the bus in disgust. The bus lurches forward. I balance my weight on the good cheek and lean the mangled metal against a pole. Not a single commuter looks my way, as I peep around furtively to see the impression I'm making.

The bus winds its way toward my school, where I will lock the frame to the bike rack -- a puzzling work of abstract sculpture for anyone who walks by. That day, I will wait in line with the Card Carrying veterans, and make my copies of my unremarkable handouts. I will have an unremarkable observation and get unremarkable feedback. I will mention the accident to no one. I will not stop until 7th period lunch, to return Erin's missed call. (It's only then that she'll remind me I forgot to file a police report. Luckily, Sharon answers my call and her insurance company takes care of the aftermath.)

After hanging up with GEICO, only then I allow myself to think. To wonder. Was I dead? I should be. Was this all a dream? This day. This life. A dream? Then it hit me. If I wasn't dead, I certainly wasn't living.

A Year in the Life of a Library Teacher During a Pandemic (Continued)

by Erin Dalbec

Walking on the beach
responsibly means keeping
six foot distancing

No trips out of Mass.
Metrowest is at high risk
stay-ca-tion summer



Marblehead, MA by Alex Laser

Distance

by Tyson Bailey

It's fifteen feet from the couch to the chair—
hardwood floor sprinkled with dirt, dust and hair.
I sit here in the chair. She sits all the way over there.

It wasn't always this way.
We didn't start sitting so far away.
We practically sat on each other, back in the day.

That empty space is just distance, nothing more.
It's a bond unbroken, in spite of all that floor.
The space has grown, but love is still the core.

Time changes all, that cannot be denied.
The trick is to embrace the change, not to run and hide.
Memory is the enemy, change is on your side,
appreciate the distance; you're still on the same ride.



now, sissy that walk. by Alex Laser

Tough Like Micky

by Elvin Cardona

I'm not sure how to tell her. Maybe I can tell her a nice lie, like the ones I will hear from everyone around me until I die. They'll tell me that everything is going to be ok, that I'm strong like my grandfather back in Rathkeale, that I'm a fighter like Micky Ward. *Bullshit*. Last week was the last time I lied to her. I told her I loved her during a movie. I can't remember the name of it to save my life, but it was about a love story. She cried during the part when the wife was staring into the husband's face after the accident, not knowing who he was anymore. I imagined her staring at me the same way. Her confused eyes shifting to different parts of my face. Eyes...to nose...to mouth. Knowing that she is supposed to remember me, but doesn't, that she is supposed to love me but doesn't—it would make all this easier.

The car ride home was quiet. She was talking about the movie, but I wasn't listening. As we got closer to home she let out a few more tears, saying that she couldn't imagine that happening to us. Then she told me she loved me. I told her I had a headache. I should have told her that I'm not doing the kind of falling that women love, that little girls dream of when they play House. It's changed. We've changed. Things have changed. Now, all the memories I haven't made yet play in a loop in my cubicle, in my car, on my bedroom ceiling. It's too loud. Unlike the first ten minutes after the doctor told me. He was telling me all my next steps, but all I heard was silence. I apologized to him—had him repeat himself. But I don't remember if he said anything about how I could tell her.



Photo by Alex Laser

Turn

by Ana Tellado

You are now sour, like milk forgotten by the breakfast bar.
"Detour" you warn, and I don't listen.

Deviation would be the easiest action
to find an alternative route to you.

A short walk, a ride, a sprint around the block,
Anything but touch, sight, or voice.

"Don't see me," you say.
You don't want a witness to behold your pain.



Diversion would be the smart choice
to end hostilities between the two.

You changed direction in the plot of life,
Drew a fork dividing your path from mine.

"Swing around and walk away."
"Don't hear my cry," you say.

Wring my memories, step on them,
Tear my spirit apart, won't you?

Disturb my living with your indifference.
Your silence detonates in my ears.

You are now shriveled, your petals beyond their bloom.
"Don't see me," you say.

But it's impossible not to see...
You've turned.

Fading, withering away,
You deprive me of healing scorn.

I will withstand your deafness,
Your slow shift from woman to ashes.

Bewildering sorrow will ebb the tide.

Turn the page and steer a different course now.

I have left us.

Bait and Tackle

by Alex Laser

In his forehead,
I see the wrinkled worry marks
He passed down to my dad --
That imploring face,
Both hopeful and forlorn,
Resigned
To rejection
From a shallow boy.

"Do you want to come with me
To the bait and tackle shop?"
Grandad offers,
Buoyant,
Raising a bushy eyebrow.

A laugh track sounds.
My cartoonishly oversized eyes
Bounce back
To the squat black
Box before me:
Hour three
Of the *Dexter's Laboratory* marathon.
Caught up in Cartoon Network,
I know cable is a wonder reserved only for
Summer visits to the Cape.
A hedonistic feast
Off limits
Under the eye of abstemious
Parents.

I pick my teeth with my tongue.
A pause.
"No, I'm okay," I say,
Sucked into Dee Dee's
Vacant blue eyes.
Her pupils ricochet from wall to wall
Of the candy colored
Lair of her
Little brother,
Lost in the gadgets of his
LAB-OOOR-A-TORY

Silent,
Grandad recedes
Into the
Peripherals,
Swallowed in shadow.



fish dish by Alex Laser

The pale light of the TV flickers
Reflecting against
My sallow profile,
Framed by the wings
Of the La-Z-
Boy chair.

In the house,
A beam
Settles,
Echoing through
Cobwebbed recesses
Of antique emptiness,
Swimming in handpicked collections
Of colonial claptrap:
Undusted oil lamps,
Musty samplers,
And hunting decoys.

I half-register Grandad's truck
Skimper away
On the gravel outside,
As I absorb
The circus of colors on screen.

On the adjacent wall sits
The oil painting of a woman
Of ambiguous age
In a puce bonnet.
Her blanched skin
And pursed red lips
Are cast in relief
By cracking black backdrop.
Her eyes,
Both naive and wizened,
Watch me
Knowingly.

A flicker of lightning
On screen --
Dexter throws up his black
Gloved fist in rage
At the discovery his sister's impudence.
Animated drops of spit
Fly
From his pouty lips,
Cursing

Dee Dee for disturbing
The sanctum
Of his LAB-OOOR-A-TORY.
His lilliputian frame
Is silhouetted under her monstrous stork legs
And pink tutu.
IN-SUB-OOOR-DINATION!
He shouts,
Mouth agape.

The crunch of gravel.
The whirl of tires.
Slam --
A pickup door shatters my hypnosis
A wind chime tingles pathetically in alarm
Rapped by the flimsy screen door,
Which springs back furiously
Against the peeling
Red framed
Entrance.
Heavy boots clod closer
On the sandy floorboards

Grandad's figure
Towers before me,
Black against the monitor,
Brows knitted --

Worry ditches
First irrigated
In surgical rooms
Squinting to stitch together bodies
Or return home to tie tackle to a
Fly fishing line --

Crevices worn
With the strain
Spent watching his grown
Children bicker over their childhood belongings
At Thanksgiving and Christmas --
Scrimmages for inheritance tournaments --
Wondering if he'd made good
Choices --

Temples
More often smoothed
Into the sandy dips

Of marshland
Rounded by receding waves
Of retirement --

Sockets
Crowned
With crow's feet
Like the poned sandprints of seagulls
Embroidering the vast dunes
Between his house and sea,
Washed over with waves of laughter
When his face was
Flush with cranberry bog wine
And lobster,
While I sat on the boards
Between his hairy legs
On hot Summer evenings,
Absorbing cool
Cross breezes
Off the Sippewissett marsh.

Memories
Cut short,
Like a broken fishing line,
By his grandson's floundering
In comical muck
Refusing the colorful lures
To quahog
To hunt
To sail
To fish
And pass on the legacy
Of his
Fidgeting fingers and
Endless tinkering
In pastimes
And diversions
More numerous than the
Grooves in his head

The boy from Boston,
Of humble stock,
A self-starter
A surgeon
Living in Falmouth,
Not far from the beaches
Of his childhood summers



call of the waterman by Alex Laser



Watercolor by Gabby Cardozo

Stood before
The fisheyed
Lenses of his
Grandson.

"Get up,"
He spouts.
The ridges now arrows pointing
To red eyes
Ablaze.

"Get UP."
His words snap
Like a discarded surgical glove

I blink
My jaw hangs open
As I hook into the seat cushions
For the cable remote
Without removing my eyes from his
And flick the tube off

"Let's go."
He turns.
I reel back to pull the wooden lever of the archchair
My muscles flopping,
Atrophied by a child's Cape diet
Of endless grape soda
And Oreo sleeves
On retainer for my visits.
The overstuffed chair
Snaps shut like the mouth of a hungry bass,
And I slide to my feet.

Silent,
I sit beside Grandad in the pickup,
My mouth resting in my salty hand
Propped on the open window,
My forehead furrowed.

As we turn into the bait and tackle shop
I venture
A glance
To the pilot
And catch
The dimple of a smile.

A Year in the Life of a Library Teacher During a Pandemic (Continued)

by Erin Dalbec

Zoom chat is their voice!
our introverted students
Speak their minds through text

We want to go back!
give us ventilation and
surveillance testing



Drawing by Denise Billings

LEAKED: Ten Tips for Running a School System During a Pandemic

by Ryan Normandin

The following letter was authored by a secretly formed cabal of administrators in Newton, MA. It was obtained through an anonymous source.

Dear Fellow Superintendents, School Committees, Principals, and Mayors,

The 2020-21 school year was rumored to be inconvenient for educators and students, but it was positively traumatizing for all of us in leadership positions. Being asked to meet the bar of “not repeatedly screwing people over in the worst ways possible” was simply an unrealistic expectation.

Nonetheless, we’ve put our collective heads together and created a list of the strategies that were most effective. Ideally, we’ll be able to bring many of these innovations with us as we return to non-pandemic schooling.

1. Retroactive Planning

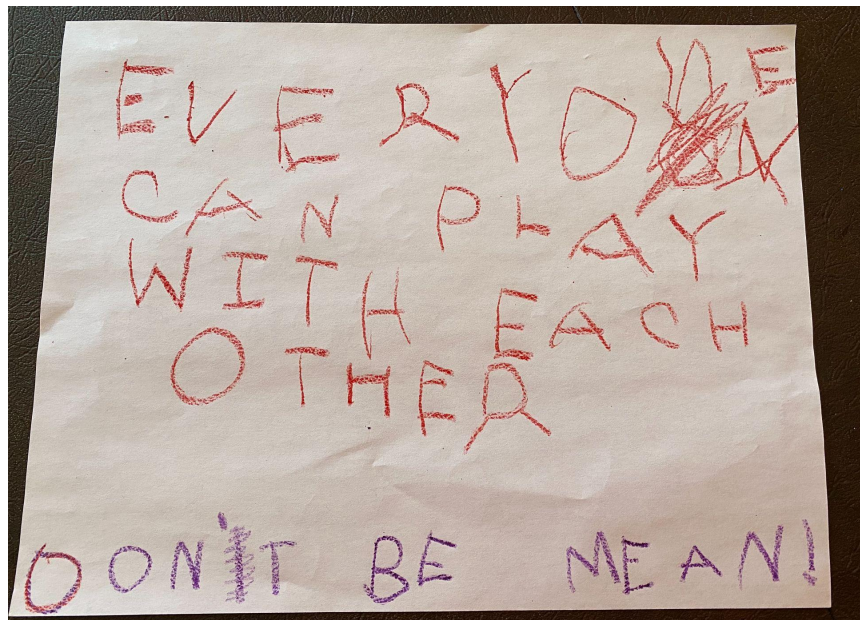
Who would’ve thought going into the pandemic that we’d have to unlearn so many of the tools that we previously relied on? But the pandemic pulled back the curtain, revealing that fundamentals like “planning ahead” were actually quite detrimental to everyone.

In the summer leading up to the school year, several of our membership were faced with impossible questions such as, “What will the schedule on Wednesdays be?” We were asked this question right in the middle of a lunch order, which was *itself* in the middle of a rather close game of Monopoly: School Administrators Edition. We tabled the question as quickly as our lunch order, and this allowed us to really live in the moment as we began the school year.

The freedom we felt in sending out Wednesday’s schedule every Tuesday evening was liberating, as was the ability to finalize the schedule several weeks after the year had begun. We had a lot on our plates, see, so it was really nice to be able to utilize what we call “retroactive planning,” where we come up with answers to questions three weeks after they were needed. This was also referred to as the “better late than never” strategy, and we believe it has substantial potential for next year. We’re already planning to use it for the mysterious “Flex Blocks” that our district’s new schedule implements – four years in the making, and we look forward to figuring out what they are sometime in December.

2. Go Easy on Yourself – In Public, with Great Frequency

As aforementioned, the expectations that people had for district administrators this year – primarily, doing literally anything – were simply too high. If you were a frequent viewer of school committee meetings, you heard firsthand how hard it was for all of us to receive mean emails. I’ve attached a few below for you to get a sense of just how cruel the public can be.



Everyone Can Play With Each Other,
Don't Be Mean

by Kate Shaughnessy

Dear School Committee,

What is the Distance Learning Academy? Your survey asking families to choose a learning model said that details were TBD. Just want to make an informed decision for my children.

Best,

Dear School Committee,

Have you asked any teachers to weigh in on the learning models? It sounds like they have some good ideas.

Sincerely,

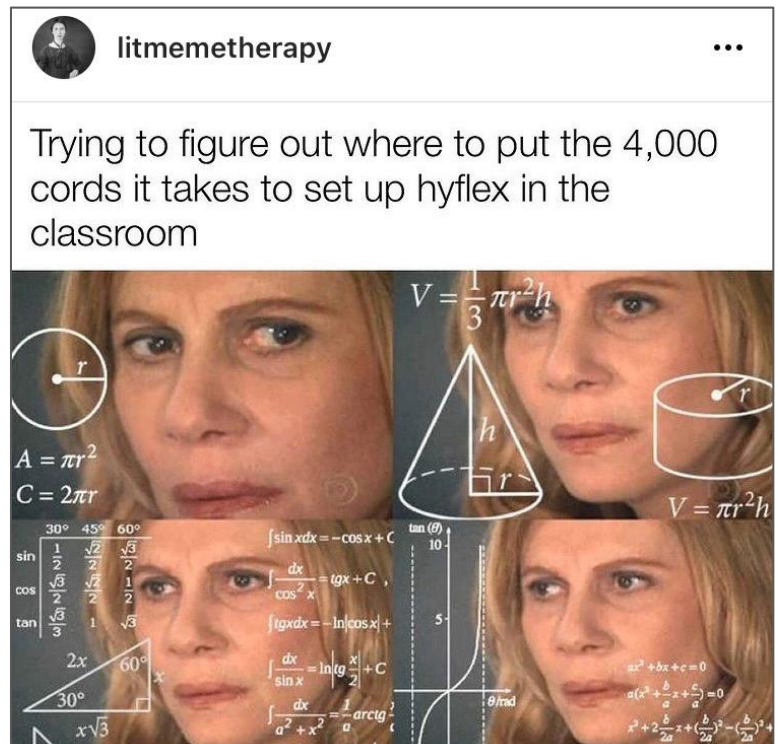
If this doesn't convince you that being on the school committee, which is something that we actually vied for the public's votes to do, is a Herculean task, nothing will.

With pressure like this, it's important to remind yourself, and everyone around you, that you're doing great. Superintendents, the school committee, and the mayor in Newton found it highly esteem-building to boast regularly about how hard they were trying. In a year where mental health has been so important, ours was greatly enhanced by claims along the lines of "we've done an incredible job," "this is probably the smoothest rollout of any school system in the state," and "we're locked to win re-election." Whenever the public asks how you can congratulate yourself while the world is falling apart, how you can be so utterly detached from reality, just remind yourself that *earned* confidence is way too much work to be worth it.

3. Never Listen to Teachers – In Fact, Don't Even Ask Their Opinions

Everyone knows that the best plans are designed in isolation from the systems they're intended to plan for. A flawless process like this leads to smashing successes such as No Child Left Behind, trickle-down economics, and Pringle cans that are too small for people's hands. Imagine how much more difficult plans would be if they had to take reality into consideration – then we might as well be teachers!

Teachers, who are forced to deal with reality, are incredibly inconvenient when planning for a school district. We come up with brilliant ideas like Flex Block, and teachers ask stupid questions like, "What is that?" We come up with common-sense rules like requiring teachers to Zoom into remote classes from inside classrooms with horrible wifi, and they respond with an idiotic, "Why?" Teachers exist to get in the way of progress, so it's better to leave them out of the planning process. People with expertise and experience in the area you're planning for make things too complicated. This is why NASA faked the moon landing; it's easier to throw together a movie set than it is to work with all those difficult morons who could actually build a rocket.



Looks like behind my TV stand in there...
by Maureen Kavanagh

4. Scapegoat Teachers

The brilliant thing about teachers being experts on how things work in actual classrooms is that people *assume* they must have been involved in the planning process. This assumption should be explicitly encouraged as often as possible. In Newton, we started off the year with our mayor blatantly lying in an email that claimed the educational models were developed in concert with teachers. While a bit direct, most teachers' unions are too much of a mess that lack a functional public relations capability to point out that this is a lie. The lack of clear messaging from the union should also be capitalized on. With no message from *them*, we get to control the narrative, which is that teachers are evil whiners who don't care about your kids. If anyone confronts you directly on this, pivot just a wee bit, and explain that teachers are actually mostly good, but the *unions* are sinister forces for evil. If they point out that the union actually *is* just teachers, shrug, wink knowingly, and say, "That's what they *want* you to think."

Teachers, who are too exhausted getting burned out with their real jobs, won't be able to muster any significant opposition. This will allow you to redirect all criticisms and failures onto them, even when they had nothing to do with them. Here in Newton, we've successfully blamed teachers for the year's schedule (which they had no say in), the homework policy (which they had no say in), the grading policy (which they had no say in), and Tom Brady leaving the New England Patriots.

5. Keep Things Fresh with Frequent Changes

Admittedly, we did get *one* idea from teachers. During long blocks, they try to keep students' attention by shifting tasks. We wanted to make sure that *teachers* were staying engaged, so decided to take a similar concept and shift it to the extreme. Every time teachers started to get comfortable, we made sure to keep them on their toes by yanking the rug out from underneath them. This was primarily done by changing the schedule frequently, but we also enjoyed forcing them into the building in groups at a time, stripping away medical accommodations that were previously granted, and generally making things up as we went. Once or twice, we even swapped their cars in the parking lot just for the giggles!

6. Surveys Say What We Want

Surveys are pretty straightforward. We ask questions, people answer them, and then we wildly extrapolate the data to support whatever conclusions we want. Now, *some* have pointed out that there's a field called "political science" which in conjunction with another mysterious area called "statistics" can ensure that surveys actually get the data that you want them to. Avoid this at all costs!

In Newton surveys this year, we have:

- Left out options that we didn't want people to select
- Utilized vague wording
- Drawn graphs without axis labels
- Utilized biased wording that encourages respondents to answer the way we want
- Drawn graphs with meaningless axis labels
- Asked respondents to choose options with wildly incomplete information

It's remarkable; numbers are like magic. Once we put numbers on a thing, people clamored to parrot those numbers, believe that those numbers meant what we said they did, and generally give our process and conclusions far more weight than they merited. It was one of the easiest and most effective ways by which we controlled the public narrative and perception. Beware – if you see a group of people laughing or looking incredulous when you present your data, remove them immediately, as they're probably math teachers, who will quickly see through your devious subterfuge.

(Note: At the end of this article, you will be asked to answer the following question:

Did you enjoy this article?

Option 1: Yes

Option 2: Very much so

Option 3: It was my favorite piece of writing ever, and I'll be submitting this to the New York Times on your behalf)

7. Use the Magic Words that Solve All Problems

"We hear you."

"We appreciate you."

BOOM! Problem solved. It's hard to describe how powerful this technique is in shutting down opposition. On multiple occasions this year, we literally beat up teachers in a back alley, but as long as we smiled and told them that they were appreciated, they were super chill about it! "We hear you," was my favorite phrase to utter as we ignored them. At the beginning of every meeting during which we shared the latest problem that we created for teachers to solve, we told teachers that we appreciated them. If the tears, frowns, and middle fingers were anything to go by, it evoked quite a powerful emotional response! Whenever someone comes to you with a complaint, this is your get-out-of-jail-free card. Once you tell the complainant that you've "heard" or "appreciated" them, you are under absolutely no obligation to take actions that would address their concerns. That would be a lot of work, and I believe I mentioned earlier that we were averse to that.

8. Keep Teachers Busy

During a normal school year, teachers regularly have periods of time during which they are not teaching called "prep blocks." This year, the same exact thing is true except that the teachers are at home instead of in the school building, which means they're undoubtedly lazing about, drinking, gallivanting, and otherwise engaging in tomfoolery. Some teachers have tried to point out that they actually have far more work this year than they would during a normal year, and they need these prep periods more than ever. Don't believe them! The lazy bums are just trying to preserve their Netflix time.

There are many ways of preventing your employees from succumbing to their slovenly natures, some direct, others insidious. The direct method we had the most success with was simply mandating that teachers be in the building for meetings that could be Zoomed into. Some teachers complained that this meant they traveled an hour or more both ways just to Zoom into a meeting from their classroom instead of their living room, thus losing two hours of prep time, but remember – they weren't going to use that time to prep! They were going to use it to mine Dogecoin and take naps!

Indirect methods are also effective. For example, when our schedule gave teachers prep blocks in the morning, it's ideal to schedule a meeting beforehand, rather than in the afternoon. This forces teachers to wake up bright and early, immediately hop onto Zoom, and get into that school mindset. It also communicates the unspoken truth: that if we *didn't* schedule a morning meeting, we *all* know that teachers would sleep until 2pm rather than prep for their classes.

Finally, remember that they're not *really* prepping during their prep blocks. As such, you should feel free to schedule important meetings during that time. If they complain, make them "optional," but ensure that they're on topics like safety, grading, or the schedule so that they're optional in name only.

We've had enormous success this year in eliminating teachers' "prep" time, and I hope other districts will be able to employ some of our tools to good effect.

9. The Angriest, Loudest, and Least Informed are Always Correct

The title says it all. Frankly, none of us enjoyed getting yelled at during school committee meetings, so we decided to shut them up by doing whatever they want. There were legions of teachers who had been in the buildings for years telling us that the ventilation was nonfunctional, but there were some people with *really loud voices* who said that it was functional! I mean, come on, who would *you* believe? Sure, there was very little research on the safety of schools at the time, but there were some *very* confident people who yelled at us that schools were one hundred percent safe.

This bullet kind of falls into the whole point about ignoring teachers, but it's really broader than that. *All* experts and data should be ignored (unless they're saying what you want, of course) in favor of those mean people who yell at you and post mean things on social media.

10. Relentless Positivity

Stay positive! If you're a school administrator dealing with a suffering, traumatized school of teachers and children, the best thing to do is to ignore that suffering (or "we hear/appreciate you"), and pretend that everything is just dandy. When teachers see emails with lots of exclamation points, they will automatically become happier – that's just science. Use neat colors, words like "hooray!" and an entirely tone-deaf attitude for long enough, and teachers will surely brighten up. At least, they're supposed to.

Here in Newton, unfortunately, we're cursed with teachers who are real complainers. They refuse to smile even when we point out during public meetings that though many of them are "monotone," *some* of them are creative! Come on, that's a compliment! Even cursed with the group that we have, our relentless positivity eventually made them stop coming to us with all their whiny problems like "mental health," "safety concerns," and "suggestions for improvements." Our hope is that some of them really started to question their own state



Meme by Maureen Kavanagh

of mind; how could they be sad and suffering when all of us administrators were positively cheerful? We did our best to cut out collaborative time among colleagues as well in order to isolate them and encourage the questioning of their own sanity.

As school districts throughout the world return to a new normal next year, we hope that some of the tools expertly deployed in Newton will be helpful to other administrators.

Sincerely,
Newton's Administrative Cabal

Essential

by Kel Lowndes

I scurry back into my apartment to grab my keys, or my mask, or whatever other essential item that slipped my mind as I walk out. As I stroll through ALDI, I attempt to decode a scattered grocery list where I forgot to add that one essential ingredient necessary to create a meal I'll actually enjoy for more than once.

It's essential to cook something worthy of multiple microwave blasts as I prepare both my meals and my mind to reenter the classroom after almost a year of remote learning, trapped and locked in a building for 8 hours. I got this.

It's essentially the same type of teaching, just a different location, right? That's what I've heard at least. Pessimistically pondering having to re-engage in a daily morning commute,

I'm thankful I bought my bike before every store was essentially empty for months. I hit a mental roadblock that stops any optimism for entering my crowded mind. I don't see the excitement of reconnecting with the terrible school wifi. I'm not sure how to revamp a class for hybrid after 3 quarters of remote, and frankly, I don't want to.

It doesn't feel essential for me to rewrite the book on teaching in a pandemic.

Essentially, fuck hybrid.



The Titanic sounds like fun right now.
by Maureen Kavanagh

Flood Warning

by Ana Tellado

Wind, thunder, lightning, rain
Promises of a tornado
And still here I am
Anchored, wanton, waiting
For the storm that would fill me
For the rays that would break gloom

Heaven's kisses are tears of ice on my face
Tyrants robbing my hours
Burdening me with their sharp caress
Thieves in the dark
Taking everything that's fresh, leaving only a bygone time piece
The foul reminders of what was briefly beautiful

The breeze promised to sweep me away
You came to lift me upon your shoulders
And then you went with the wind
Leaving me in the desert
Swallowed by the sand
Choking and gazing at the dark sky

An absent moon with a few stars
Drops of bitter dreams
Abandoning me to join the clouds
Dragonflies from my eyes
Taking anything worth remembering,
 leaving only an empty shell
The recollection of what was abruptly rendered

Snow, sleet, hail, pain
A disturbance up ahead
And someone in the road
Unmoved, tired, waiting
For the outpour that would shake her
For the rush that would erase them



lunar bliss by Alex Laser



Photo by Emily Lew

A Year in the Life of a Library Teacher During a Pandemic (Continue)

by Erin Dalbec

Trump out, Biden wins!
and white extremists riot
they can't stop the count!

Herd immunity?
The shot changes everything
Get your vaccines now

Hate crimes in Georgia
and zoom bombs in Newton, Mass.
racial reckoning

Ahmaud, Breonna,
George, Daunte, too many more
gone, not forgotten.

My America, Your America

by Tim Finnegan

"This land is your land; this land is my land..."
Seems so far away that land had any meaning
Other than as the backdrop
For destiny toward the sunset
For "it's mine, now--sorry for the confusion."
For "go back to where you came from!"
For any reason I have to make it *mine*.
This yard is *my yard*.
You stay in *your yard*.

And ignorance is bliss, we know,
In hindsight alone.
For whether we learn through
Choice or accident,
Still the knowledge makes us ache--
Not like the aches of lashed, ribanded backs
At the slice of an ox's tail;
Not like the ringed, rosy burns
Of ropes seared into struggling necks.
We fill on fantasies made manifest
Until they "real-y" hurt.

And I, too, ache America;
I, too, bleed its narcotized, sanguine oil.
And yes, my America has been swaddled
In a world that was carved out on my behalf.
Because I look the part, I am a part.
Because you look away; you stand apart.
My words of solidarity likely cut
Because they change so little;
My deeds of speaking truth
Aren't near enough the posted goal.

What would Walt Whitman say?
We needn't ask. We have his words.
What would Walt Whitman do?
The more we learn, we sigh.
And Alexander Hamilton, too,
Owned people, though he knew
The sting of how it feels
To be cast away from home.

Perhaps the best that we can do
Is knowing there's no middle.
But moving somewhat centerward
Is always where we start--
From margins of discomfort
To muddy, mottled middling ground.
We wage the war of time
Just hoping for a chance
To prove our words are true--
That we are not the ones
Who trampled Capitol Hill,
Who prove the hopeless prophets'
Long fingers, longer words.
Welcome to America.
There's so much more to see,
But now, with buttocks bared,
Atonement smacks like whip cracks.

I'm sorry for your lives;
I'm sorry for my part.
I pledge you my allegiance
To speak to our new heart.



"Damn it. How will I ever get out of this labyrinth?"

by Alex Laser

Ngin

by Emily Lew



Photo by Emily Lew

Sitting on the counter, legs dangling,
I watch you soak black mushrooms
You draw close, hand counting my freckles,
each one incarnate of a life we spent together:
the smell of cilantro beneath your nails
You tend to winter melon soup,
a recipe you tell no one, kept only in your muscles
Dried orange peel sizzles, plunging into broth,
and without looking up, a finger rises
to the center of your lips

There are things you'll never say in this kitchen
You won't speak of the crawl space,
or how you cut your hair and held your breath
You won't mention a week without water,
the smells of the boat,
how they held you over the side,
legs dangling
Instead you smile and watch the sky change

Your son said when I was born, you forgave everything
A brick through your window,
the names they called you
were just pennies in a swear jar
because we were together again

You feed me soup, and it runs down my chin
Your eyes say "we don't have long"
so I nod, mouth against sleeve
as you look through a window in the ceiling

My eyes open in the dark
Nose clings to notes of ginger, or mirin
You'll never tell me, even now
I can only hope to close my eyes,
and watch you watching the clouds
remembering what it was
to be a child

&

by Jolleen Filio

What is your favorite punctuation mark?

Mine is the ampersand

I love its sound - /'ampər,sand/

I love its form, curves and points - &

I love what it stands for - “and”

I am a person of many ands

I am a counselor and calligrapher and collector of various hobbies

I am Filipino and Italian and Chinese and American and a TCK

I am highly organized at work and a hot mess at home

I am a couch potato and a bouncing ball of energy

I am scatterbrained and intensely focused

I am ambitious and laid back about it

I am open to try many things and have high standards for quality

I am warm on the inside and cold in my hands and feet

I like cats and dogs and most other creatures

including spiders and snakes!

I like heavy nonfiction books and trashy romance

and sci-fi and scientific journals

I like leather and lace, neutrals and wacky prints

I like Pokemon and Dark Souls, Candy Crush and Mass Effect,

Light and fluffy, and dark and gritty

I like guys and gals, men and women,

and anyone in and out of the gender spectrum

So why should we let ourselves be

Ended by periods.

Separated by commas,

Divided by semicolons;

Taken “out of context” by quotation marks

Explained away (by parentheses)

Marginalized [by brackets]

Interrogated by question marks?

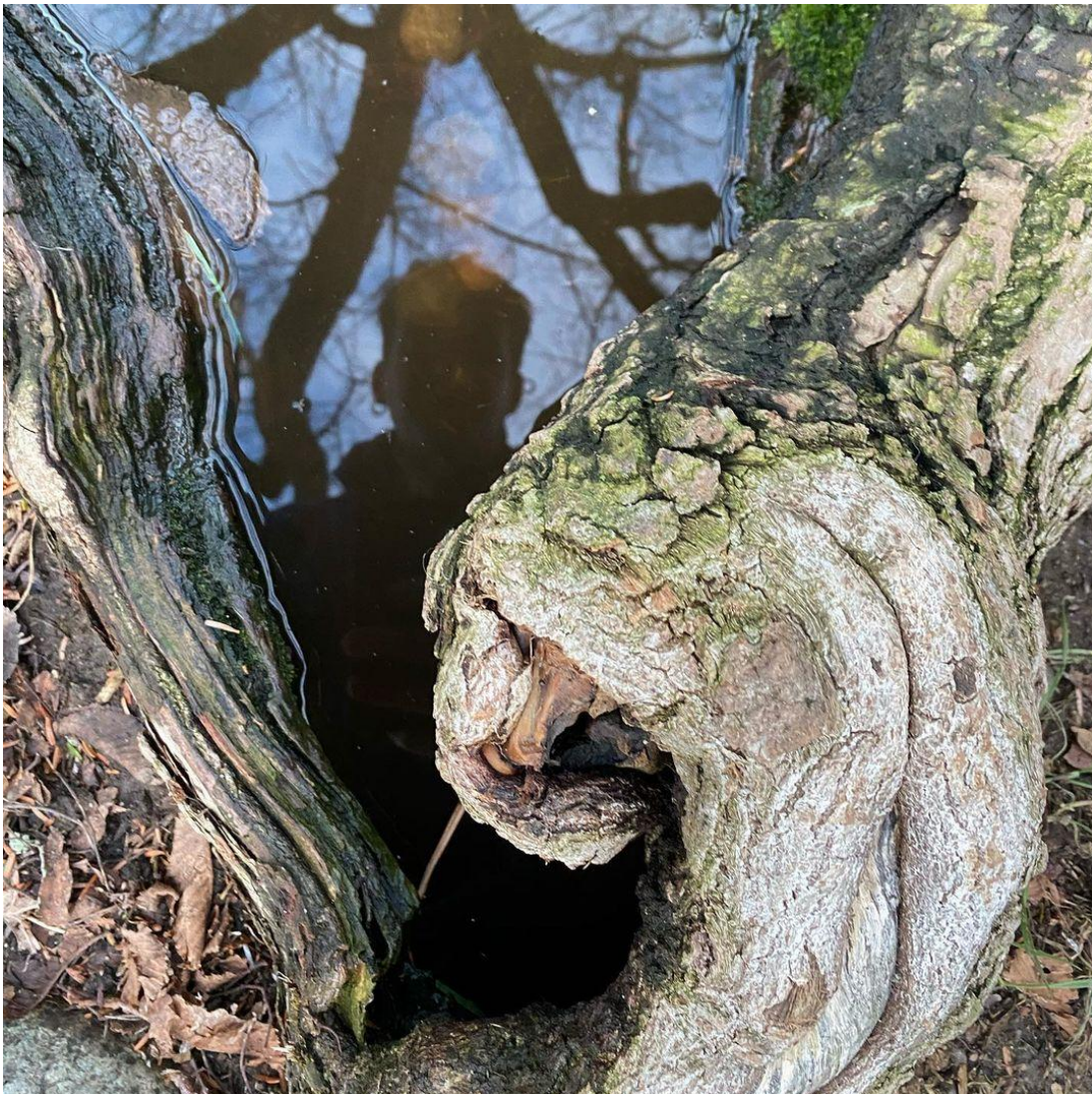
Embrace all your “ands” with the &



Hair

by Kel Lowndes

Growing up with long hair,
Forcing a brush through it, ensnaring in a ponytail
Being banished to the bathroom to comb it
Hitting a breaking point, chopping it down
Breaking open a door into a new self,
Staring in a mirror,
Realizing that *finally*,
Seeing the perfect haircut, comfortable
Feeling like Narcissus, confident
Looking proudly and strong
Realizing that
The hair is mine



treeple, pt. 2 by Alex Laser

Next Year

by Alex Laser

Next year I want to take another minute before I send that email

Next year I want to throw capitalism over my shoulder like a jiu jitsu takedown

Next year I don't want to say, "I'm so sorry this happened..." or "I'm thinking of you"
or "I'm so frustrated we're still saying 'Next year...'"

Next year I want to huck my phone into the ocean and strip down to my bare ass
and scream and laugh and cry and cry

Next year I want to try drugs that make me miss my mind

Next year I want to lie down next to my wife at night and say, "You're so beautiful. I'm so
lucky to share this moment with you"

Without wondering what time to set my alarm for

Next year I want to travel the world, and see places that aren't advertised on
Viking River Cruise

Next year, I want the waves of change to crush the seashells of my ego into fine sand

Next year the waves won't swallow us

They'll launch us forward



Photo by Emily Lew

A Little While Longer

by Felicia Prass

Gold tears gleam like glass in a gutter--
godly gifts gone by guns.

Gone like gold tears.
Glowing across the river at sunset.
Gone, but still golden...



Photo by Emily Lew

A Year in the Life of a Library Teacher During a Pandemic (Continue)

by Erin Dalbec

Back in the building
at last I see our students
but we still wear masks.



Photo by Shuaiqi Hu

Helvetica, Sans

by Michael Cullinane

The worry he once felt, worry for whether or not they liked him, had been replaced by dread. Mr. James Munsen wasn't sure when the change happened over his twenty year career as a high school English teacher. Once, he'd scorned and shamed students who didn't have their essays or stories submitted on the due date. Now, he showed gratitude for receiving them at all. His head throbbed wondering if he had changed or they had changed and then it throbbed double time when he realized he was thinking old-man-thoughts.

The faculty was reminded at every meeting, *The students are the ones who are suffering, greater than we could imagine.* A sea change from when Munsen started, during an era where the teachers felt sorry for themselves. Munsen still pitied himself for his concrete feet, stuck in a role that grew stranger every year with students having less and less in common with him.

The apathy of another day. His thoughts harkened back to the depressing song lyrics he worshipped when he was their age, the songs that still rang in his head. He'd turn up the music during his free periods, his headphones perched on his balding dome, and he'd work his head, trying to wrangle a string of feelings. The sort that he used to channel. The passion, the rage, the hope and the hopelessness of it all.

But the flow was clogged, and all that he managed to feel was dread as the minutes left in his free period ticked away. *They will soon be in here, and I'll have to talk.* Munsen's desk was unkempt, just as his outfits that grew more slovenly every subsequent year. Books he'd never read were stacked under papers he'd never grade.

Next to his desk hung a calendar open to October, despite it being March. The calendar was a gift from his now ex-wife from three years ago. She'd always buy him planners, organizers, calendars, anything to try to give him the structure which came so easily to her. October's picture was of a transcendent sunset on the beach. Now a permanent piece of artwork in his class which the students might glance at while he's speaking until they realize the picture is more boring than his words.

Munsen took a long drink of his tepid coffee and let an "aah" escape him. He checked his work email which like his other accounts was mostly spam, and he finished his powder sugared doughnut, a daily treat he rewarded himself at the halfway point each day for making it a part of a way through the grind. The sugar mixed with the coffee to form a rancid stickiness in his mouth. He took a sip of water and swished it around then spit into the garbage can next to his desk.

The students would enter his creative writing class in three minutes. Melvin first with the big eyes, staring him down silently, until he pulled his phone out of his pocket that he wouldn't put away for the entire class.

It's them, not me. Such an old-man-thing-to-say. He could see the way the younger teachers could tap into this generation's energy--the laughter and arguing next door. Ms. Baxter, fresh out of college and savvy, kept them discussing whatever the hell they talked about on the way to their next classes.

Munsen's class didn't even cause disruptions. They just sat, listening to music on their headphones, pretending to do just enough work so he couldn't get mad at them, and they'd leave him alone. A symbiotic relationship of doing the least possible.



I'm not amused. Ask Johnny.
by Maureen Kavanagh

For a time he considered the popular expression, “Fake it till you make it.” That’s poetry, right? Fake those emotions that had long since been dampened like old guitar strings with anti-anxiety medication. And the alcohol when he returned home. But alcohol was a depressant, which led him to ask his doctor for an antidepressant. The d-word. Depressed. Not him. Sure, his students, but not him. Maybe it had always been this way. God, didn’t he eat a doughnut a day in high school for lunch?

He had written the prompt before his first class in purple marker framed inside a red box on the lower right corner of the white board.

What do you like about yourself? If you were a character, what would be your shining stars? Write about yourself in the third person in story format, celebrating these wonderful qualities.

He’d decided on it during his car ride to work. It wasn’t enough for the teachers to love the students; the teachers had to teach the students how to love themselves. Not a prompt like he’d done in the old days, blasting screechy Velvet Underground tunes and screaming at them to bare their souls for the page before screaming to rip the pages to bits tossed into the garbage, his nonsense mired in Robin-Williams-Seize-the-day-platitudes. Bullshit white savior fantasies. *I once was there in your shoes.* Make it, destroy it. Make it destroy it. Every year until it didn’t make a lick of sense any longer. Now, his swampy brain whispered “Make it--but don’t expect me to read it, please.”

He wrote on a sticky note the plan.

1. Welcome students
2. Share prompt
3. Ask students to share
4. Reflect on prompt

In his younger days, all of that would have taken the first fifteen minutes of class. Now, he’d try to stretch it out through the whole 50 minutes, even though it was likely no one would share their writing. If that were the case, Munsen decided he’d give the students a “brain break,” a term which had gained some popularity as the faculty worried that the students were often being pushed too hard and too fast.

The room filled. He heard the laughs but not the jokes. They were polite enough, saying hi, smiling, full of secrets he’d never know.

“Fake it till you make it.” The sort of bullshit poetry that people hung on their doors. The teachers. Next to the motivational signs. “Only brains wired for success are welcome here!” What the does that even mean? But there was poetry in there somewhere. “Fake it till they break it?” Too obvious. No. “Fake it till they break you.” God, what kind of asshole would he be to hang that up in his room?

At one point he fought administration to have his chance at teaching Creative Writing. And once he “got” the class, they kept giving it to him, year after year without question. The department chair (four department chairs ago) saw him fall in love with teaching in that course. He even assembled the school’s first literary magazine, which, now, unfortunately didn’t receive enough submissions to maintain an existence.

Martin Bishop arrived late as he always did, stopping Munsen mid-sentence, bobbing into the room with his ripped, shredded corduroy pants and Converse All Stars covered in equal parts magic marker and mud. Munsen stopped speaking while he entered. Bishop stood by his desk staring at the wall, possibly at the calendar, scrutinizing the room. Munsen’s head throbbed when he thought of the name “Bishop.” Not hatred, but something else. His pulse raised, watching him stand when he should have been sitting. Watching him able to shirk the rules and never face a consequence.

“Hi Martin. Could you take a seat?”

Martin stood, staring at space, until it was clear he was sitting on his own fruition.

Of the eighteen students in the room, seven wrote the prompt. Munsen took one lap, weaving between the desks and tapping his pencil on the desks of those students who never began. He didn’t speak, just hoped a gentle tap would motivate. It worked for two. When he tapped on Bishop’s desk, he looked up and quickly scanned the prompt on the board.

“Does this have to be positive?” he asked. “I mean, about ourselves?”

“Well,” Munsen wasn’t expecting the question, despite it being quite simple. “I suppose not. Maybe you love a negative trait. Perhaps you could make it work.”

He wore black. T-shirts of bands Munsen had never heard of. Often the same clothes three or four days in a row. Bishop once came to school wearing a flowery dress, and his hair a new color every few weeks, presently magenta with deep brown roots. But he could write. Better than the rest of them, all self-obsessed whiners lacking any distinct voice. Munsen always read Martin Bishop’s work--at least when he turned it in. Bishop could make it out of the traps set for the kids-these-days if he just found some discipline and perhaps a foundation to keep him grounded. And he wrote his response to the prompt--with a tongue peeking out of the corner of his lips and a maniacal stare. He wrote so quickly Munsen wondered if it was all just scribbles and doodles. Probably. That’s what they teach these kids these days. Just fake it. Write down some nonsense and go back to your phone, braindead on another brainbreak-holiday.



Photo by Emily Lew

Munsen called on Martin Bishop to read second. Though Bishop's hand was raised fastest and highest, he didn't want him to go first. He wasn't sure why, but he felt the need to call on one of the simpletons. He'd done the job so long that he performed his tasks rote, the way he always did it.

"Martin, go for it," he said as soon as Samantha Long was finished reading her reflection on how she overcame issues with her family.

"Okay," Martin said, faking nervous. "Should I stand up?"

"No. Stay in your seat."

"Okay, okay." Perhaps he was so confident that the only way he could keep himself ironic was to feign awkwardness. He could have been on the debate team or the lead in the theater productions. Anything. But this was what Martin Bishop settled on. An instigator.

He stood up. "I love myself because I am a virgin."

The class snickered. Munsen didn't take his eyes off Martin, didn't even blink.

"I've made some poor choices in my life. Everyone knows that." He looked around at his classmates and let out a nebbish snort. "But I've never made the biggest mistake. I've never let my desires, my throbbing wants and needs and," he slowed, "huh-huh-huh-huh-hunger overtake me or overwhelm me or over... throw my righteousness."

Martin stomped his foot, no longer a dweeb, now a butterfly out of his chrysalis. "My right hand has never wronged my, well, you know, my righteousness. I shut out and shut up my lust with a steady diet of graham crackers and Billy Graham, and gram after gram of Lorazepam."

Munsen shuddered at the word. Martin Bishop had taken on the air of a Baptist preacher.

"My body may want, and my heart may throb, and my genitals may fantasize about traveling off my legs and joining another body, a body of a man without such righteousness, without so much discipline of his right hand, a man who can't leave it alone."

Martin Bishop possessed the "on" switch, the same one so many of the greats held. The sort of on switch you were born with. The sort of on switch Munsen heard when listening to Jim Morrison rant mid-concert about snakes and police officers and murder. Or the kind Kurt Cobain channeled during interviews, full of sarcastic smirks and "I-may-be-shit-but-I'm-a-shit-ton-better-than-you" attitude. Martin Bishop was *Hair*, the musical. Martin Bishop was graffiti on the wall, not a spray-painted penis, but more of an "fuck off and die."

Was there one of these at every school? As long as Munsen had taught, he'd never had any quite like him. He knew he should have silenced his reflection, his poem, whatever it was. But he couldn't; he was entranced and infatuated with what he might have been at that age had he had any guts, any talent, and, *what do you call it*,chutzpah?

"And do you know?" Martin looked around the room at the smiling faces, egging him on, begging for this--this break in the monotony of the day--begging for it to never end. "Do you know what keeps me pure?"

"Mikey, do you know?" Mikey shook his head, shocked to be called on, smiling.

“Fern?”

“I don’t know, Martin. What is it?”

“I’ll tell you Fern.”

He waited, relishing in the attention. Knowing he held them in his outstretched hand.

“I was born... with... a...”

He threw his body into his desk, buried his head in his hands and screamed a muffled scream, “I was born with a tail!”

The class erupted with the sort of laughter that gets the principal called to the room. Munsen didn’t try to quiet them, despite the fact that all eyes were on him. He didn’t say “quiet down” or “that’s enough” or any of the other teacher-speak he’d normally use. Munsen wasn’t rattled. He simply couldn’t take his eyes off Martin Bishop. And he wanted to be glaring at him when he raised his head from his arms.

Martin knew better. He opened his arms, craned his head to the side, and began reading in his notebook with the side of his head still on his desk. He wouldn’t look at him, so Munsen simply called on Carly to read her piece, even though her hand wasn’t raised.

“What if I don’t want to?” she said.

“What if I don’t care?”

Martin held back, pretending to sort through his backpack, but clearly delaying his exit until everyone else left. Munsen knew this meant he wanted to talk. Students who waited until the class left always wanted to talk.

“Sorry about that earlier,” he said. Not sheepish, but respectful. Was it with real or ironic respect? Munsen didn’t really care.

“But,” he stuck out his hand with a small piece of paper on it. “Here you go.”

Munsen read it. A flyer. “Bury your dreams in a Friday night blackout.” The writing scrawled in circles around the photocopy of a photocopy. Each letter looked traced over about seven times. A picture of a naked woman with Trump’s face covering her private parts. Hackneyed.

“You like music, right?” Martin smiled. Alone together, he sloughed off the act and seemed himself. Sort of what the students would have called “chill.”

“Yeah. Well, I used to.”

“This is my band. Stupid name for it, but we just settled on Shit Jacuzzi. Last night. Sorry to swear in front of you.”

“That’s okay.”



Muybridge by Eileen Garagin

“We didn’t even have time to write our name on the flyer.”

“Well, as long as you have it by the time you play.”

“So, you’ve been to lots of concerts? There’s something I’ve been asking everyone.”

Munsen nodded.

“We want a stage show, you know, but we don’t want to do anything stupid like dress up or have moves or anything like that. Our drummer thought of something, and I was wondering if anyone had done it before?”

Munsen needed to use the bathroom and was getting antsy. He never handled one-on-one conversations with students well, often more awkward than them. He put his two thumbs in his pants’ pockets and bounced on the balls of his feet, faking it to make it through the minutes he could have already been in his car, driving home.

“Have you ever seen a band have a digital screen on their bass drum? You know, the big one in the middle.”

“I know what a bass drum is. And, well, I’ve seen lots of bands have their name or their logo on it.”

“Right, but what about a video playing.”

“I’d imagine that would be impossible. There’s a lot of bass coming through a bass drum. A lot of rattling.”

“Everything rattles. And people stick videos on things that rattle all the time.” Martin stared with pleading eyes. Munsen had to look away.

Munsen moved to the white board and erased the prompt, nodding that he understood.

“Picture this. Our band name. Shit Jacuzzi, written out in like Helvetica or something.”

Munsen turned. “What’s that?”

“You don’t know what Helvetica is?”

“No.”

“It’s a font.”

“Oh,” Every assignment Munsen gave students had the text unmodified. What was the point to think about fonts?

“Anyway, the band name would start bleeding out, like red would drip from it, and it would transform into that sort of metal font. Not sure if you’ve seen it. Those sort of metal fonts that you can’t even read, really.” Martin looked down at the ground, embarrassed by his own band’s idea. “You know, something like Lamb Slaughter or something. We’re not a metal band, but it would be sort of a joke. And it would just happen on a loop, over and over.”

“Okay.”

“You ever seen anything like that before?”

Munsen thought about the hundreds of concerts he'd seen in his lifetime. Before he was a teacher, back when he was full of pissed off angst like so many of his students. He became employed and developed the smirking resilience to burn the candle at both ends, staying out late drinking at punk shows, then making it to school on time to still meet the kids head on.

Then he got married. His wife never liked music much, and he never wanted to go alone, without her. Or to leave her alone at night. It felt wrong. Now divorced, he didn't return to concerts. Too old. And sleep, the motivation to sleep, a nap after school and early bedtime, well, that conquered all. The beers never quite stopped, but he made sure to finish his last one before nine thirty.

Munsen took a deep breath and handed the flyer back, almost sharply. He was angry, but not sure why. "I've never seen that because it can't happen." His hand still outstretched. "There's too much rattling and that sort of thing doesn't even make sense."

Bishop ignored the comment and smiled, "No, you keep it. You should go." He took a close look at Munsen's face, awkwardly close. "Is your ear pierced?"

Munsen, still holding the flyer, pulled it back into him and stuffed it in his pocket.

"What? No. This?" He pointed at his earlobe. "Oh, no, that's just a mole. A freckle."

Munsen had been asked that question before quite a few times. Years ago. And it was just a small birthmark in the exact spot an earring would go.

"C'mon, you've got to. All the other teachers just laughed when I invited them."

Munsen looked at the flyer, the naked woman on it, the twisted letters, and he imagined himself at the venue. With students. Standing in a corner, alone. Could he even order a beer? Is that allowed?

The venue wasn't far from his house. And the show started at 7:30. He could just stop by.

"Well." His head throbbed with an impending headache and he remembered that he had to pee. "Sure, I can come by for a bit. Been a while, I suppose." He pulled the flyer back out of his chackis and read it again. *Just say yes and get rid of him.* But couldn't he go, just for a bit?

"Sweet." Bishop, having got what he wanted, threw his backpack over one shoulder and started out the door. "We're the second band. They said we go on at 8:15. You've got to let me know what you think of our third song. I really hit on something with the lyrics. Let me know what you think."

Bishop was rushing out the door. Munsen's belly jolted with those butterflies he remembered, the sort he had when he was pushed high on the swing. Or the girl he had a crush on in junior high walked past him.

Bishop slapped the top of the door frame as he exited, "See you tonight!"

Munsen smiled and yelled words before his brain could process them. "Yeah, see you... see you in Helvetica!"

Martin turned and reentered the room, a little shocked. "That's a good one. You've got jokes, Munsen."

Munsen laughed to himself and tripped on a student desk walking back to his own. He laughed. Clumsy. Still the clumsy, awkward kid. Just never could quite fight it out of me.

At his desk, he uncrumpled the flyer and stared at the hollow "o" that Donald Trump's mouth formed. Thousands of bands like this existed. Christ, there was probably already one out there named Shit Jacuzzi who played one show in front of five people. The whole thing felt so pointless. But if ill advised and unrehearsed music projects were pointless, then what was the point? Munsen had struggled with this lately, usually halfway into his nightly six pack, between his after school nap and bedtime. After searching his high school friends on Facebook, finding them now ugly or obese or clearly fucked up but trying to pretend they were normal. They made Munsen feel better about himself. *At least I'm not that. At least I'm not ever going to be that.*

The point had always been to not end up like that. But then he did, now he did. Now he is one of those, but maybe worse because he didn't even try to pretend. Those lingering platitudes. *My-thoughts-are-more-interesting-than-your-thoughts. It's going to happen for me, just a matter of time. I never gave in; I never gave up.*

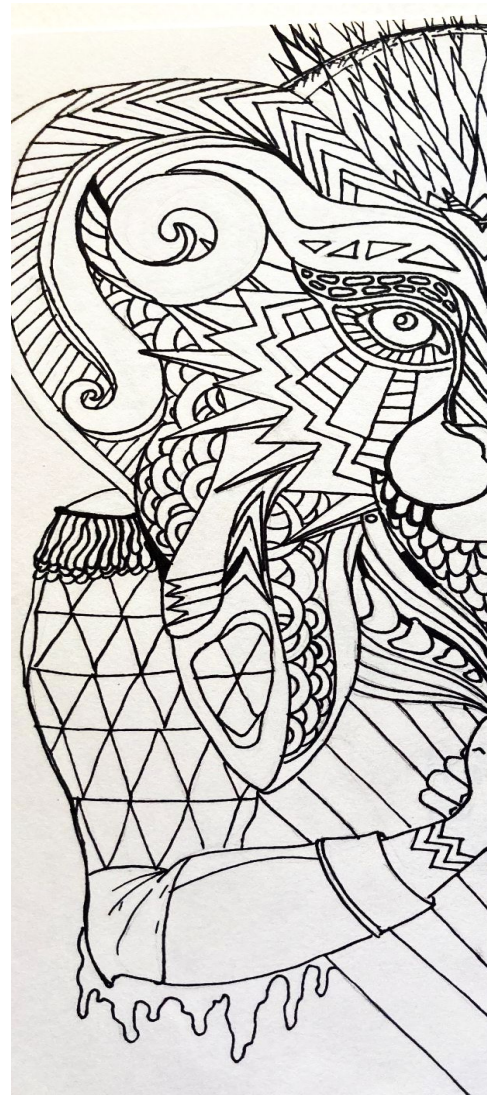
The kids couldn't tell him apart from any other miserable middle-aged asshole. Martin Bishop didn't pick him out of a lineup; he gave a flyer to all his teachers.

Usually at beer number five of the night, Munsen worked through a category of his brain he called "Missed Opportunities." With the flyer in his hand, he returned to a typical one, Lindsay Modin. The girl who left his junior high to move to North Carolina but came back every summer to visit her friend, the one who lived down the street from Munsen. They liked each other. Munsen's neighbor made sure they both knew they liked each other. Junior year of high school, Munsen still hadn't so much as gotten a peck on the cheek. He managed to awkwardly hang around Lindsay, smile, play basketball, ride bikes. But he never found the means of acting on his impulses. Couldn't even hold her hand. On day four of her weeklong trip, she told her friend to tell Munsen that she liked a new boy but that they should be friends, news Munsen took with a straight face and a lump in his throat. He'd blown it and despite the letters he'd send to North Carolina following her visit, he'd never get another chance.

On his walk down the nearly empty hallway to the bathroom, Munsen looked at the flyer again and thought of Lindsay. He'd found her on Facebook, married, children, overweight, smiling like all the others.

He crumpled the flyer and threw it in a dented wastebasket, imagining the fifteen hundred ways going to the show could turn wrong. Awkward. Terrifying.

He pushed open the bathroom door, holding it so a couple of kids hanging out would leave and get to class. Going to the concert would be foolish. Silly. It would be silly. Instead, he decided, he'd stop by the store and get the good six pack and listen to music in the peace of his own apartment.



Waiting for 2:35
by Jenni Morreale



Drawing by Denise Billings

The loudness seeps into
Dutiful instruction
Like a monster clawing at the
Foot of your door, with sharp
Black
Claws
That threatens to tear apart the whole damn thing.

Then like dominoes, they fall
With your face to them
Watch as they drift away.
2:00pm, I hear
“I don’t have the mental capacity to do this.”
At 2:01 you’re like, “girl, same.”
In your head, of course.

And with that, will you try to
Yank the reins only to have them cut and bruise
Till you let go--
For a second.
But that’s enough.
Now, with rising heat snapping at your poorly chosen heels.
As you prance across the room with purpose
They grow restless--2:15

And when they disperse and I am left with me
My mind has become my worst enemy
In this field.
Not the feeling of loudness
But the loudness of the
Crushing knot in my sternum,
In the pit of my stomach.
The chaos clashes
With the over-organization
That can not be achieved
When another thing is due
Everything is due.



**English Teacher Pet Peeves Tournament
Bracket** by Tim Finnegan



Clammy Smiles

by Alex Laser

In the aftermath,
You and I curl up
On the couch,
Insulated
Under dyed wool
From the cold night mists,
Not because we have to--
Because we want to.
I'll caress your cheeks
With my clammy hands;
Our legs will entwine.

The screens we watch
will be windows
To smiling faces of every color --
Not locked doors that give way
To the battery
Of pale monster
Or let noxious vapors
Seep through the cracks
Into our house
And minds.

In the aftermath,
We'll sit around the kitchen
On the Cape.
Grandad will pass
Me a quahaug and a knife;
I'll dig into the clam's smile
And pop it open.
I'll slurp the brine and the flesh

I won't taste my tears
When I look at the empty wicker chairs
Where he sat beside Nana,
Her cheeks rosy from wine,
The two
Inhaling the wet marsh air.
We'll laugh and throw
The shells,
Like our cares, onto the heap
For the night scavengers

His antique scalpels collect
Dust in the attic
And I'll remember a healer
Whose laugh echoed against
The wooden panels of the house
And made me forget
The rage that his eyes

Sometimes betrayed --
Glimpses of White terror
Behind a surgical mask.

In the aftermath,
I won't be waiting for the call
The cracking
Faraway voice
Announcing
The expected death
I won't mask
My numbness in feigned surprise

I won't act shocked
When the fragile barricades fell
The windows smashed
The marble halls flooded
With blood red signs
The white dome,
Snapped open
Like a shell,
While ravenous mouths
Licked their lips

We won't shiver on the sofa --
We'll rise from our seats.
We'll raise one hand in a fist,
And outstretch the other to lift up.

In the aftermath,
We won't sign to friends
Behind glass.
We won't breathe on the pane,
And draw hearts,
Or display Teddy Bears
For children to hunt.

We'll display our hearts to all --
Bear our teeth,
Our tongues,
Lips,
To the air --
But we won't forget how to smile with our eyes

In the aftermath,
We'll drop sticks off the bridge
And run across the to other side;
We won't wonder if we'll ever
See them come out again.
The stream is unobstructed,
And you and I see our faces
In the reflection.

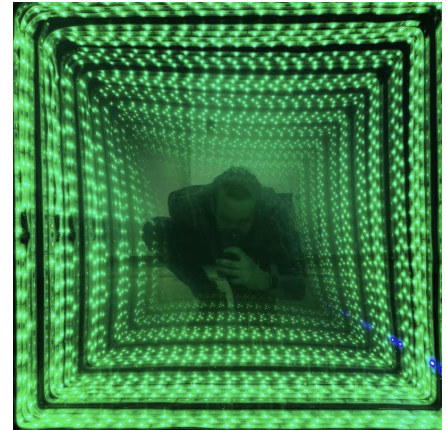


Photo by Emily Lew

Zinesters

Alex Laser (he/him/his): English teacher lifer, punk rocker, White boy, and anti-racist coconspirator, living in Boston, MA. I'm all about connecting teachers through the power of art, writing, and shared spaces. This zine is the product of lots of love and is at least nine months of work before a publication coinciding with the birth of my second daughter.

I'm thankful to all the friends and teachers I've met around the country who have made this zine possible through their love, creativity, and encouragement. My teacher family rocks!



Rafael Ibay (he/him/his): English teacher on a break, lifelong learner, progressive Pinoy poet, & French Fry connoisseur, living in the City of Angels. What I'm for: exploring this journey we call life & living the questions through art & literature. I'm grateful to collaborate with fellow educators on this zine, sharing our experiences of the teacher life.

Shout out to the teachers, forever & always.



Kel Lowndes (he/they): Chicago transplant. Radical English teacher whose famous classroom rule is curse at situations not people. Open to learning about almost anything (just not any more math). Constant coffee drinker. Lover of all salty snacks. Deconstructor of gender. Believer that art and writing can lead us to process, connect with others, learn, unlearn, relearn.

So grateful to be a part of this zine and the opportunity to connect with all of the writers/educators/contributors. Extra grateful for the accountability so I continue to write. :)



Tyson Bailey (he/him/his): Licenced history teacher working as a teaching aide around Boston; Writer, actor, lover of stories and good conversation; I'm all about trying to pay forward the joy and wonder life has given me, however clumsily it might be sometimes. I've found that opportunity in education and, in doing so, also found many like-minded folks, who cannot help but inspire those around them (myself included) to be better, including the incredible people who contributed and welcomed me into this amazing project.





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